



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>





600072362Q





H I R E L L.

A Nobel.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "ABEL DRAKE'S WIFE."

"If the first among the problems of life be how to establish the peace and restore the balance of the inward being——"

"I know not what true definition there is for any age or people of the highest excellence of any kind, unless it be perpetual effort upward in pursuit of an object higher than ourselves, higher than our works, higher even than our hopes, yet beckoning us on from hour to hour, and always permitting us to apprehend in part."

"It is, I think, an observation of St. Augustine, that those periods are critical and formidable, when the power of putting questions runs greatly in advance of the pains to answer them. Such appears to be the period in which we live."

W. E. GLADSTONE.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.



LONDON:
RICHARD BENTLEY, NEW BURLINGTON STREET.
1869.

[All rights reserved.]

250. W. 312.

CONTENTS OF VOL. III.

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. HIRELL'S JOURNEY	1
II. WERGE CASTLE	35
III. HIRELL'S RETURN	70
IV. GONE	77
V. NEWS OF THE PRODIGAL	80
VI. BROCKHURST	98
VII. THE REFUGE DISCOVERED	115
VIII. DARK DAYS	132
IX. EVENING VOICES	146
X. AT THE HOODED HOUSE	153
XI. CARRYING THE HAY IN THE STAR MEADOW	161
XII. ROBERT COMES TO TEA	180
XIII. NEWS FROM HOME	189
XIV. OLD FRIENDS	199
XV. ROBERT SETS HIS AFFAIRS IN ORDER .	212
XVI. LEAVE-TAKINGS AT BROCKHURST . .	232

CHAPTER	PAGE
XVII. KEZIA	241
XVIII. AN ARRIVAL AT BOD ELIAN	250
XIX. HIRELL'S CALL	257
XX. AT THE MARTYR'S OAK	264
XXI. THE BITTER CUP	283
XXII. THE SOLITARY	292
XXIII. THE AWAKENING	310
XXIV. MIDNIGHT AND DAWN	323
XXV. LETTER FROM SIR JOHN CUNLIFF TO ELIAS MORGAN	337
XXVI. 'DIES' IRÆ	340

HIRELL.

CHAPTER I.

HIRELL'S JOURNEY.

CUNLIFF felt himself possessed by a wild joyousness, unlike the calm, deep happiness he had had in Hirell's society at Ewyn y Rhairdr. His step was quick and elastic, his glance restless, his very voice irrepressible; and Hirell smiled to hear him several times singing a snatch of some sweet air she had never heard, and which, as soon as she was interested in it, would be stopped and another begun.

Hirell's mood was very different. She was silent, and her steps were slow and measured.

As they were descending the little path

between the ravine and the field, Cunliff looked round at her quickly.

"This is the first time, Hirell, I've seen you walk down here," said he. "At other times you have always come bounding down with the speed of a born mountaineer as you are. The chamois itself could hardly have so certain, vigorous, or delicate a foothold. Do you come so slowly to-day as a wholesome check on my impatience, or why?"

Hirell looked into his half-laughing, half-jealous eyes, and smiled with an affection so deep and tender, that his doubting was changed to delight.

"How bright and merry of heart you can be," she said. "I envy you, Mr. Rymer, and yet I don't know for why. I believe my happiness is at least as great as your own."

"Yet till I reminded you—you are coming along blithely now—you walked at that funereal pace."

"When I see Nanny rushing down the hill," said Hirell, "and her pails swinging lightly in her hands, Kezia and I look cross at one another, for we know she has little or nothing in them—but when she comes slowly

and sedately down, looking slyly out of the corners of her eyes into the pails, I clap my hands and run to meet and help her ; for I know then her burden is very precious and bounteous. And if you won't think it *very* rustic and milk-maidish, Mr. Rymer, I should say a full heart, like a full milk-pail, must be carried quietly, soberly, or it will overflow—as—look, you have made mine."

For great tears were rolling down her cheeks, even while her laughter rang gaily in his ears.

They found the carriage close by, waiting for them under a little avenue of trees ; and the driver looking with sharp curiosity to see who it was the English gentleman had come to fetch at so unlikely an hour from Bod Elian.

The horses were striking the ground impatiently, thinking they had been there long enough, and the driver was standing at their head quieting them with his hand and voice, while his glances were turned towards the coming lady.

" Oh, Hirell Morgan, is that you ?" he exclaimed, as she came up to him. He spoke

with an air of familiarity not at all disrespectful, but intensely annoying to Cunliff.

"Now, my man, mount! I'll see to the rest," he said, irritably.

"Yes, David," answered Hirell with a smile, and the faintest possible indication of increased colour. She knew David, he was one of their congregation, and her first thought was how she should like to run back and comfort Kezia by telling her that David Roberts was the driver; and that, both going and returning, she would be for a considerable time under his care.

For one single moment she looked back, but the next she saw how foolish it would be to keep her lover and the carriage waiting, without being able to give an intelligible reason; for she would not even seem to Mr. Rymer to have confidence in any but him; so with glad trust she dismissed the thought, and entered the carriage. Cunliff followed, fastened the door after him, and away went the horses at a great pace, in obedience to Cunliff's hint of

"Fast as you can!"

Cunliff had done well to strike a kind of

mirthful keynote by his buoyant vivacity at the moment of departure, if his aim were simply and honestly to banish from Hirell's loving and filial heart all fear of her father's displeasure ; there was something so genial, so pure, so unlike aught that suggests danger or doubt, in his behaviour, that Hirell would as soon have questioned the beneficence of heaven as her lover's truth on this sweet, May morning.

Hirell wore her chapel dress, a very different one from that which had made so sweet a glow of colour in the market-place of Dolgarrog on the Sunday when Mr. Rymer first saw her.

Even if Elias had permitted her to keep one of the fine dresses of that time, she would not dare to be seen in it by a congregation among whom she was one of the poorest. But the experiences of that bright and busy time had made Hirell so cunning in the management of the poor clothes remaining to her, that she had been able to unite the prettiest fashion of the day with the austere simplicity demanded by her sect, in the common, coarse linsey which she now wore. Its colour reminded Cunliff of her own native mountains when the heather

was in bloom—a kind of misty violet, not bright, but soft and rich. A ‘train’ in the chapel would have been thought almost as great a defilement to the stones as the cloven foot itself, therefore Hirell’s dress was short, and looped up at each side over a snowy, crimped frill which was Kezia’s pride to keep as she said “like the snow when it lies on the ribbed sands at Aber.” A little cape, the same as her dress, fitted closely to her figure. Her hat was also home made. It was tuscan, of a rich, old-fashioned plait, and was made out of some ancient bonnet that had been left to the family with the effects of a rich, grand aunt of Elias Morgan’s. Hirell had undone the straws and made them up again into as charming a little round hat as Cunliff had ever seen at pic-nic or croquet. As he looked he was again changing his opinion, and going back with fresh zest to his first impressions. And now he could not but notice that Hirell wore new and delicate kid gloves. It had been a matter of some consideration with Hirell as she stood looking at them in her bedroom, whether she should or should not take them from the long resting place for Cun-

liff's sake. There was something sacred about them as a lost friend's last gift. When Robert Chamberlayne was Mr. Lloyd's pupil, he had once taken Hirell into the chief shop of Dolgarrog on her birthday, and told her to choose whatever she liked best for a present. She had chosen a pair of bright, delicately coloured kid gloves, never having had such things on her hands before. And ever since, as the birthday came round, a pair of gloves from Robert had arrived with it. Her latest birthday was in the week following Robert Chamberlayne's last visit; and thinking that visit would be a long one, he had brought his offering with him, daintily fresh and perfumed. Then, when he found how things were between him, and Elias, and Hirell, he gave them into Kezia's charge. "Ask her to accept the old present for the last time, Kezia," he said; and added with a tone of unusual despondency, "Who knows, Kezia, but what she may give her little hand away to some other fellow in that very glove? Somehow I feel she will."

"It's a shame, Robert," Hirell had said to herself as she put them on, while Cunliff was

impatiently calling to her at the foot of the stairs that morning ; " but," she said, touching the soft, scented surface with her lips, " they shall not be defiled by the touch of any hand less honest and true than your own, Robert."

Of these thoughts Cunliff knew nothing, nor needed to know. As he finished his examination of her, he said to himself :

" Whence comes this wondrous instinct of woman for self-adornment ? By heaven, she is artistically perfect, and I was a most conventionally-minded ass to doubt it !"

On the bridge, over which they went at a walking pace, they met the postman who delivered letters along the road beyond Dolgarrog, and whose beat included Bod Elian.

Hirell looked wistfully towards him, then suddenly lowered the window, and putting her head out, said to the man :

" Any letters for us, Richard Pugh ?"

" Eh ! Miss Morgan, that you ? Yes, there is one."

" Indeed ! I am so glad I stopped you," said Hirell, continuing to talk in order to cover her anxiety while he ransacked his bag. " I

am so anxious about Hugh and my father," she said, turning to Cunliff as half apologising for the delay, for he had immediately called to the driver to stop on understanding her wish.

A rather bulky-looking letter was at last discovered, and given to Hirell, who looked at it with obvious surprise ; and after a moment or two of hesitation put it in her pocket, and begged Cunliff to tell the driver to go on.

Cunliff wondered, and did as he was bid ; then wondered why he had wondered, and answered himself by the mental comment that he had seen the address, that it was not from Elias, that it was from some one who wrote a formal, but handsome and manly-looking hand.

Who could be the writer ?

Hirell on her part did not seem in the least conscious he was or might be putting such questions to himself ; and there was something so *naive*, simple, and frank in her behaviour, under these, as Cunliff thought them, peculiar circumstances, that he could not help giving her for the first time credit for some little taint of the wisdom of the serpent in modification of the innocence of his dove.

"Your letter, Hirell ; pray don't mind me," he said, after a brief pause.

"O, I had forgotten it already," said Hirell, with a look that Cunliff thought conscious of guilt ; and he was the more satisfied of this when he observed she made no movement to correct the omission.

The sight of the people in the market-place gathering for some holiday excursion, stopped for the moment further questioning.

As they passed through Dolgarrog, Cunliff drew back into the obscurity of his corner as far as possible, and in doing so noticed that Hirell did the same. But the charming tint that her secret thought had raised on her cheek, had, he felt, no response on his ; and the fact once more began to make him very thoughtful.

For a moment or two only. He had come into this day's work with a determination not to think, not at least until the inevitable hour when all must be made known.

"Now, Hirell, hey for England !" said Cunliff, gaily, as they cleared the town of Dolgarrog, and began the long and picturesque ascent round the shoulder of Criba Ban.

"For England!" exclaimed Hirell, with eyes dilating, and a momentary spasm of fear, which passed away in a sweet shame as she saw his enjoyment of her surprise. "I have never been there."

"Is it possible? Never in England!"

"Never! But oh, Mr. Rymer, how can we do that and be home again to-night?"

"Easily," was the answer. "We do just advance a little way into England beyond the Welsh border, that is all."

"Ah, well! I am so glad. It is something to say one has been there at last."

Somehow this little incident set Cunliff thinking in silence to himself as to many things about Hirell which he fancied so secluded and inexperienced a life must involve; but suddenly he began to explain the course of their journey, as including two or three hours of the present conveyance, then rail for a like space, then again some vehicle for half-an-hour to reach their destination, the great house where Mr. Rymer was to meet his friend, the steward of the estate, and where——

And there "Mr. Rymer," as the sweet

musical lips continued to call him, stopped ; with the abrupt reflection that, however she might receive what he then proposed to say to her, it would be cruel to risk telling her while so much of the bright, happy day remained, and which his words might——

A kind of thrill ran through him as he thought and thought of what lay before them, and especially as he pictured the having to travel together homewards.

He felt for her no doubt ; while obeying the prudent philosophy of his and our teachers—felt as much as it was in his nature to do. Cunliff unhappily shared—but as a victim rather than as an originator—in the heartlessness of the intellect which is one of the most deplorable phenomena of our time ; and which seems to be chiefly due to the egotism of the national character when not restrained by noble aims, and a vigorous activity of life in the effort to realize them ; but when rather—as with us now—it is fostered by the itch for and habit of ceaseless criticism. We are all of us nothing if we are not critical. The trader who has not an idea beyond his ledger, the woman whose one thought is fashion, the boy

and girl with their eyes just opening on life, the rich and poor, the idle and industrious, are each and all as critical as the cultured teacher who steps forth from his studies prepared to show the hollowness of everything that old-fashioned men have been accustomed to revere ; or as the practised statesmen, so called, who, originating nothing, stand ever on the watch to attack with their destructive criticism those who attempt to build in the light of faith, and with the results of the knowledge of the past. And all the while they seem to have no idea—these insatiable critics—that their process is one that may or may not achieve what they expect from it, but is sure to destroy the best part of themselves. One can hardly help asking, if this be not the modern way of selling souls to the Evil One ; who was the first—and remains the most powerful—of critics ; and who—with creation for his theme—works out his principles of criticism to their natural end.

The credulity that can believe in the value of a perpetual system of cynical analysis, is only one step removed from the credulity that teaches the analyser he or she is too superior a being to be obliged to recognise ordinary

laws of humanity ; which accordingly they lose faith in, and so themselves become what they imagine others to be. A false atmosphere hangs about them, distorting all natural objects, an atmosphere in which no good or great thing can possibly grow. Charity becomes an economical blunder ; sentiment, "sentimentality ;" philanthropy, "mawkishness ;" patriotism, when it rises to heroic proportions and world-wide scope, "brainless ;" and the only philosophy worth acceptance is the philosophy of brute force, impregnated with the delicate flavour of a touch of fraud. These be thy heroes, O modern Israel !

And so, having criticised away all the sweet courtesies of life which ought to regulate, and might regulate, if Christianity be a truth, the relations of the whole human family ; having taught every one to expect nothing by rendering nothing ; made faith, earnestness, chivalrous feeling, self-abnegation in our every-day lives, things of banter and ridicule ; made men and women generally ashamed to avow a desire for a better state of things, or an intention to try to help it on by their own life and teaching—having accomplished all this, they explain

away religion, and put back God into His place : leaving—what ?—Themselves.

Ah, but do they not admire themselves, and have they not reason ? Is not the object they see when they happen to look that way, worthy of a Brahmin's devoutest self-contemplation ? Can they help but fancy they see a kind of magnified image of themselves influencing men, manners, and nations, correcting the past, photographing the present, shaping the future ?—a figure as grand-looking and potential as that stately old Etrurian king who sat through unnumbered centuries in his tomb, in his habit as he lived, unassailable by Time or any other enemy, so it seemed, till an unlucky spectator opened a crevice to look through, and while gazing in gréat awe of soul on the spectacle, let in unconsciously a breath of fresh air, just a single puff, but full of its own true natural elements, and lo ! there was a shimmer, a shiver, the fall as of a scarcely perceptible veil, and king and state and all were gone, leaving only a handful of gray ashes on the pavement.

Some such speculations were in Cunliff's mind this bright jocund May morning, as he

thought of the pain he might have to inflict, of his own feelings during the process, and of the influences that must have been upon him the last few years to make the meditated business possible to him. Such men are often fond of analysing themselves, and can do it with a certain skill and accuracy, though also with a tender touch for sore or dangerous places; and they take at times a morbid pleasure in it, in believing in its virtue, and in calling it "philosophy;" which very probably it may be in the modern acceptance of the word, seeing it never leads to anything, never leads to action, except indeed to paralyse action when ideas, sentiments, threaten to become dangerous to ease and self-love. We are fast becoming a nation of Hamlets, with all that is most valuable in the character of Hamlet—his faith, imagination, and deep tenderness for humanity omitted by particular desire.

But if Cunliff, like all his kind, felt once in a way he had a heart, and the presence of a worm at the core, it was quickly forgotten in the stream of the world. He and men like him have so profound a faith in them-

selves as to think that in spite of a vicious and purely self-solacing life, they are quite as open as ever to receive the purest, and deepest, and most abiding impressions from things worthy of creating them.

But he and they are alike deceived. They have after such experience no more of the natural strength to flower and fruit virtuously and nobly than trees have that are constantly transplanted ; which have no tap root of conscience ; no spreading net work of moral fibre ; and so are easily displaced, or torn up, by any strong wind of circumstance.

Cunliff, as he sat by Hirell, and luxuriated in the delight of her society, thought only of his present state, and was well satisfied with himself and state ; and did not therefore care to dwell on how all had been with him during the many weeks of his absence ; did not recall how Hirell's image had grown each day more and more dim ; how soon he had practically forgotten Wales, and the many deep and tender glimpses of spiritual beauty he had there enjoyed with her, in the scenery, and among her people ; with what zest rank and fortune had come upon him ; how he and

the world had again smiled upon each other ; and how at last he had come only to think of Hirell as one whom in a moment of folly he had committed himself to marry ; thus leaving him quite prepared to reflect on the beauty and salvation to be found in a prudent life and wiser marriage, if they were still practicable.

But with Hirell again by his side all this is forgotten, so far as his habits of mental introspection are concerned. The old thirst for pleasure is on him once more ; and, happily or unhappily, it is on the present occasion pleasure of the purest kind—so he persuades himself—that he desires to drink deeply of, for how much need may he not yet have of it, if——

To do Cunliff justice, even while also thereby committing him to a deeper condemnation, one of the most real things about him, at all times and under all circumstances, was his ideal desire for, and earnest love of, excellence in woman. That excellence, which is the soul's beauty, was in truth at least as precious to him, ideally, as any mere physical beauty could be.

In Hirell this abounds—he is with her, the world forgotten, the moment is very sweet, again he worships in the spirit of a devotee.

He thought of Mrs. Rhys—not to ask where she was, how enduring the life-long martyrdom to which in all probability he had condemned her, but to refresh himself with the recollection of the fact that it was because she had been to his imagination, more even than to his eyes, the most lovely woman he had known, that he had cared for her, and only in heart and in aim left her when Hirell came and raised and glorified his standard.

Had society developed heart as well as head in John Cunliff, he would now need but to gaze on this his latest object of passion, receive her glance in return, and at once decide beyond possibility or desire of recall, to take so sweet and precious a gift as God seemed now himself to offer with outstretched hands.

Being as he is, what is he doing, or about to do? Perhaps he could not answer the latter part of the question with absolute pre-

cision, if he would ; but as to the former he is continually reviewing his position, his promise to her, her future if he rejects her, his past evil life, which he cannot but feel has through some inscrutable process been chiefly changed, and for ever changed, through contact with her and her family. All this he considers, looks at in every possible way, and ends the doubts that oppress him by plunging once more into conversation with his future wife—or victim. Soon to go back to his solitary ponderings.

Three things abide with him through all the secret chaos of thought and feeling :—

He had told her before his declaration of love that he had meant to leave her : surely an important fact !

He had also beforehand pledged himself to Arnold to take a course which for most weighty reasons decided his judgment—his calm, cool, earnest judgment—against a marriage with Hirell.

Certainly since then he had been weak, though that was due to the unexpected strength of her beauty ; but not the less was it clear that nothing of his former belief had

changed, or been met with reasons for change, while his public career, his new rank, his large fortune, suggested a thousand additional arguments for remaining *true to himself*, to those really unbiassed convictions of his.

All this was intellectually very clear; but when the question came of reducing all to practice, the way was not so easy—when it was Hirell that had to be dealt with—Hirell, with her delicate, fresh beauty of person, which yet seemed not itself to be so much an independent power as the mould formed from within by the growth of one of the sweetest, purest, and most religious of souls. With all Cunliff's delight of eye and heart in mere external beauty, he always found himself forgetting with Hirell the eye in thinking of what it expressed—the lip, in sympathising with the thought that issued from it—the form, in the wondrous grace of her individuality of character, as shown by her every gesture, as well as by her most eloquent silences.

Hirell did not for some time notice the gathering gloom in her lover's countenance, so instantaneously did it lighten at her look, or smile or word—so prompt was he to reply to

her innocent questionings, which were incessant, and dealt with all sorts of matters.

"I have always wanted to know so many things—things that people could not or would not tell me about. Now, when I ask you, everything becomes clear—so clear!"

Thus spake Hirell during a certain pause, when she became conscious how inquisitive she had been, and with a sort of sweet shame rising on her features that he was noticing it.

"Ah, Hirell, I wish to God somebody could and would do as much for me!" responded Cunliff, with a half laugh, that did not conceal some dark gulf of doubt or remorse below.

"Dear Mr. Rymer, out of your own true and good words are you convicted. 'You wish to God,' you said. Ah—if indeed you do that! But you do! You will!"

"We'll see. But I am not going to discuss religious matters with you to-day."

The slow but certain shadow he saw overcasting Hirell's face warned him to speak further, so he promptly added—

"Not, I mean, till we have our great talk by and bye. 'Sufficient for the day is the

good thereof,' I would say, with an alteration of the phrase that I hope may be forgiven me."

Hirell smiled again, but the smile was a thoughtful one ; and Cunliff, to change the current of her thought, stopped the carriage, and leaped out.

He went to a hedge, and cut with his knife a branch, and brought it back to Hirell, who saw one of the most lovely of natural garlands, a long, flexible branch of the wild white hawthorn, oozing, as it were, with blossom at every joint and pore, the first significant sign of the coming season that Hirell had yet seen.

"Do you know what I am going to do with this?" he asked, as he called out to the driver to push on, and then began paring away the thorns with extreme care, that none might be left, interjecting an exclamation now and then, as the thorns retaliated on their enemy by piercing his hands to the quick.

"N—o," said Hirell, with a half-consciousness of a fib, and a more than half-consciousness that he must see it was a fib, exhibiting itself on her rosy temples by way of anticipation.

"I am going to put the finest of earthly coronets on the most lovely of all women," and so saying, he, with tender care and respect, wound the beautiful spray round the beautiful head, which shyly advanced a little to facilitate the operation, and when that was over, was held by him for just a few seconds, while he gazed at her—in the spirit of an artist, as he said, but even while he gazed, he saw bright tears begin to ooze, and deep emotions to flicker over the face; he felt an irresistible desire to kiss her—he did so—and then their eyes met:—hers so full of love and boundless faith, that he could no longer bear it, but seemed struck to the heart as by a spasm, and turned so deadly pale that Hirell was alarmed, and somehow from that moment the day lost for her—what, she knew not—but something of which there was no return, then, or thereafter.

"Hirell," said he, "I am curious to know how you—a woman—have so lost all curiosity?"

"I—I really don't understand," and she certainly did look puzzled; then suddenly her face flushed, and flushed again as she

thought to herself he meant why did she not ask about his name, his condition, vocation, etc.

Cunliff saw the flushes, and attributed them to the letter, which he was determined to have forth, or know something about.

"I mean that *I* could not exercise so much self-denial as to keep a letter in my pocket, unopened."

"O, I know who it is from!" and as Hirell said this her cheek undoubtedly did colour a little—though instantly there followed a kind of tender severity of expression.

"Indeed!" said Cunliff, in a tone so significant, that Hirell found it impossible to pass it without notice.

"It is—it is," she said, with an ingenuous smile breaking forth over her face, "it is from my relative—Robert Chamberlayne."

"Indeed!" again commented Cunliff, and the tone and look said plainly, "why did you not say so before?"

He saw Hirell grew more and more uncomfortable, and at last he drew from her the whole story of Robert Chamberlayne's devotion, offer, and rejection, which the present

lover listened to with chequered feeling. He could not but admire Chamberlayne: could not but acknowledge there was something more than mere sunny pleasantness of character in the man who had so behaved; but for that very reason he was only the more annoyed that Hirell should have been so mysterious about the letter.

The incident suggested to him quite a new field of speculation, and apparently it was a very unpleasant prospect he thought he saw.

Hirell, meanwhile, had drawn forth the letter from her pocket, and began to read it; Cunliff turned a little away, but not so far but he could see, under his half-closed lids, her every movement, look, or thought, as he fancied.

As she went on with the perusal, her face became very serious for a time, then full of strange light; and as she ended there was a rapt look heavenwards, such as Cunliff remembered in an old print of one of Bellini's saints.

"Read, dear friend, read! O, God is with us still. My father! My dear father! If now we could only find Hugh!"

Cunliff took the letter, and also read it

with deep interest—for reasons perhaps little guessed by Hirell.

“MY DEAR HIRELL,

“A curious thing has happened, which I think it best for you and your father to judge of without my interference in the matter any farther than I am compelled.

“But I must first tell you, that had the letter—of which the below is a copy—reached only a day sooner, your father would have had it, for he has been here seeking poor Hugh. Unfortunately I could only say I had never seen him,—never heard from him since his removal to London.

“The letter itself I have sent after your father to an address he gave me, for he could not even then give up the idea that Hugh would sooner or later find his way to me, but I have made a copy of it first for you, which I shall here transcribe :

“ ‘SIR,

“ ‘Mr. James Morgan, a partner in the late firm of Morgan & Garnet, of Bermondsey, in which you were, we understand,

largely interested, and by whose failure you were a great sufferer, has, since the bankruptcy, and the receipt of his certificate, come into some little property ; and in consequence is desirous—for special reasons, which he would rather explain personally than by letter—to make you, a countryman of his own, some compensation for the heavy loss you endured, preparatory to his paying the whole of the debts at some future day, should fortune favour him.

“ ‘ We may, from ourselves, hint that our client feels very deeply the deception practised in dividing profits, while trading at a loss, but is confident you would exonerate *him* if you knew the whole truth.

“ ‘ For the present, suffice it to say he has lodged five hundred pounds in our hands to be paid to you, as a part of your own,—morally, *not legally*—due to you, and it is accompanied only by this condition, that nothing be said to the other creditors, till such time as he himself may be prepared to deal with them.

“ ‘ He makes an exception in your case first, because he knows, he says, of certain facts

which you are not acquainted with, which makes your position a peculiarly hard one, as regards the firm ; secondly, because he hears of your debts, and how cruelly the disappointment fell on you ; and lastly, because the sum that alone he can spare would, if divided among all the creditors, produce but slight benefit or satisfaction at present, and lead possibly to unreasonable expectations and annoyance as regards the future. We are, Sir, your obedient servants,

“ ‘ MAXWELL AND DODD.’ ”

“ Such, dear Hirell, was the letter which was sent first to the solicitors I before employed, and by them forwarded to me, when they were made aware of the contents ; they thinking, I suppose, that I had managed so wonderfully well before, it would not do to employ anybody but me now,—confound them !

“ Of course I went to my lawyers, and asked them whether the thing wasn't mere humbug.

“ They replied that the five hundred pounds were ready to be paid to them at a moment's

notice, on receiving Elias Morgan's authority, and left me to judge whether *that* was humbug.

"Greatly puzzled, I went then to Maxwell and Dodd, strongly inclined to ask them to let me see and handle the said five hundred.

"The upshot is, the money is there—so *they* say ; and that your father—so *they* say—can get it either personally, or by getting a Dolgarrog attorney to prepare and send up a proper document.

"So *they* say, mind—not I.

"If you ask me whether I believe they mean what they say, I reply, 'Yes, but will be responsible to your father for nothing, after what happened before.'

"But now, my dear Hirell, I want to speak to you. I have not been a very exacting relative, companion, or friend, I think, and if you think so too, I want to get some benefit from such a character.

"Your father when I saw him, seemed to me under such a strain as no man can long stand. Either he or that must give way. Hugh, too, whom I love as a brother, and in whom I have still full faith—what is to be done with him in your father's present poverty?

“ Well then, I want you to accept from me, as an advance out of this new and most fortunate acquisition, a hundred pounds, to be used as you and Kezia shall see fit, saying nothing to your father till he has received and is quite satisfied about the five hundred pounds.

“ Should he reject the proffer,—as he certainly will, if he can find any loop-hole or crevice through which a moral doubt may pass, and take possession, then let me be Kezia’s creditor only, if you are too proud, or too unkind, to give me this one single pleasure that might be given.

“ I entreat you for your father’s sake to accept this,—and for Hugh’s.

“ I will not ask you to be sure I shall never seek *any kind of return*—for you are quite incapable of thinking so ill of me, as the words might imply.

“ Unluckily I am not likely to remain your and Kezia’s creditor long enough even to believe in my own merits, so no more from your true friend,

“ ROBERT CHAMBERLAYNE.”

Cunliff smiled once in reading this ;—a very curious smile, which Hirell saw ; but before she could ponder on its meaning, it was gone—never to return, and she forgot it almost as soon.

No wonder he did give one brief smile at the ingenuity of Mr. Jarman in obeying the instructions he—Cunliff—had given ; and which seemed to leave the business—however seemingly improbable in the abstract,—quite beyond cavil practically.

But Chamberlayne again ! He saw tears in Hirell's eyes, and was foolish enough while divining their meaning, to obtain confirmation from her own lips.

Yes, it was Chamberlayne's behaviour, she owned, that had drawn forth those sweet tears. She confessed it, while calling on him to say whether he did not share with her in the general emotion she felt.

"Yes," he said aloud, and then to himself added—"D—n him !"

With a cry of surprise, Hirell now took a cheque from the envelope, that had not before been noticed.

"See, Mr. Rymer, see ; he has sent the

money without even saying so. That is so like him, is it not?"

"You will send it back, of course?" said Cunliff.

"I think not," said Hirell, thoughtfully; yet with a kind of decision in the tone that struck Cunliff as new—or at least new towards him.

"You must! you must indeed! I will do instead what he proposes."

"Are you so rich?" asked Hirell, wistfully.

"Will you oblige me, Hirell?"

"Dear friend, do you not see, I could not so offend my own relative, and old companion, neither could I take from you—"

Hirell stopped in quite a fit of distress, that she could not make her lover understand without words, how indelicate she would have felt it, to take money from him, to say nothing of her father's thoughts.

Cunliff was silent and moody, but her next words restored peace.

"I would not take it even from Robert Chamberlayne, but I know—that he knows—that—"

Cunliff finished the broken sentence by

another kiss as if to show her he understood and perfectly appreciated the distinction between a friend who was and a friend who was not a lover.

But the thought of Chamberlayne, and the tears and smiles and high glow of colour that his name, character, and letter had brought into Hirell's face, continued not merely to trouble and perplex Cunliff, but to give a certain hardening and crystallising character to purposes that before swayed to and fro in a state of flux.

CHAPTER II.

WERGE CASTLE.

It was a great effort that Cunliff had to make to keep up the flow of talk, and yet avoid the topics that were pressing constantly upon his mind with ever increasing urgency. He concealed the efforts from Hirell, but only at the cost of feeling his own burden the more heavily.

The railway was reached, passed over, and again they were driving in a hired vehicle, which soon set them down within the distance of half-an-hour's walk of the place where Mr. Rymer was to meet his friend the steward.

They got out, the driver was told to stay till they returned, and Hirell gazed curiously about over the broad undulating scenery.

Her eyes fell upon a grand looking old

tower that seemed to issue from among the trees at some distance.

"Is that a church?" asked Hirell.

"That is the old keep of Werge Castle, the place to which we are bound. Come."

"And to whom does it belong?"

"It did belong to one who lately died, who the heir is I am not prepared to say. You see the flag staff on the keep?"

"Yes."

"There would be a flag flying from its top if the owner were at home, so we are not likely to be prevented seeing the place."

The winding road they were pursuing—a private one—was so constructed, so veiled in parts, so opened out in other parts, that at every turn some new view of the castle presented itself; and Hirell could not but exclaim with delight at the continued changes, and the growing developments of the picture as they went on.

They are now stopping to gaze at the first view they have been able to get of any considerable portion of the pile. They see water of some breadth, a bridge across the water, an entrance gateway consisting of two strong

towers, and a portcullis gate between ; the whole, with the keep in perfect preservation towering beyond, presenting the aspect of a noble mediæval fortress, standing within its own moat.

Presently that view is hidden, and a new one gradually comes into play. It is a long castellated front, some of the high arched windows showing the sunlight through their ruined state, but the whole wonderfully picturesque from the beauty of the architecture, and the ivy that clothes it.

Again, as they move on, the trees shut out the pile, till they come to a spot where the entire structure comes into the line of vision ; but where the barbican towers, the embattled and ruinous front, and the keep over all, are softened and in part hidden by the modern front which here challenges attention ; not only by its own stately beauty, but by the happy art with which the new architecture seems artistically to echo the old, without losing any of the characteristics required for modern ideas and habits.

But it is hardly these features which impress Hirell the most ; she sees their mag-

nificence, but it is as it were afar off; there is something nearer her heart in that which lies between her and the gracious stateliness of the new façade.

She and her lover stand on a little hillock looking down into one of the most perfect gardens that poet or painter ever conceived as a part of a real work-a-day place of recreation for men and women,—one where dreams must be realizable to be of any value. It was not 'the beauty of the lawns, the colours of the flowers, exquisitely as they were arranged, the individual forms of solitary trees remarkable for their elegance of foliage and rarity, the broad lake and its islands, but the consummate art with which you were led on from one kind of beauty to another; from the unpremeditated wildness as it seemed of the glades behind where the lovers stood, surrounded by magnificent forest trees of almost preternatural height and size, and where the scenery around was almost too grand and primeval looking to be called park;—it was, we repeat, the art with which you were led on, step by step, the wildness decreasing, the culture increasing till you rested at last on

.

the parterres and lawns about the Castle base ; and felt that the refinement without must be intimately allied with the refinement within ; the one a kind of repetition of the other :— God's work in the flowers and gardens, becoming a standard and guide for man's work in the saloons and chambers ; the same life inside and outside : life in luxury, redeemed by consummate taste and poetic refinement, that gave nameless charm to everything.

Hirell's joy became almost pain. She sat down on the grass, forgot Rymer, Elias, Hugh—forgot everything in gazing on the picture before her, which was too brilliant, too rich, too full of parts, and altogether too baffling in its witchery for her to understand one bit of the details, or to guess even what skill, time, money, and devotion must have combined before Werge Castle and the gardens, as she now saw them, became possible. Amid the dazzling glory of the whole, there were only three things she could fix on, a little pond full of water lilies in bloom—a long bank of scarlet rhododendrons that formed the boundary in a particular direction at the edge of a precipitous hill—and an arcade of rose-trees.

"Come, Hirell, we have little time to spare," said Cunliff, who watched her unceasingly, and took now a malicious pleasure in breaking in upon her reverie.

She turned and looked at him for a moment, as if she did not see him through the golden haze that affected her mental eyesight; then became conscious, smiled, rose hastily, and again stopped, and said with a profound sigh—

"I do not think it would be good for me to stay long here."

"Why?" demanded her lover.

He watched her while she stood considering her answer, as she nearly always did consider her answers to him; sometimes taking so long about it that he perceived the current of her thought was quite changed during her consideration. It was so now. He knew that if she had replied to him quickly, she would have spoken of the hard contrast between this place and Bod Elian. In those moments of silence, however, that thought and its sadness was swept away from Hirell's mind; and lifting her eyes to Rymer's she said in a voice very sweet and tremulous—

"I had forgotten. What contrast can hurt me now?"

And the great dilating eyes, almost divine in their pure truthfulness, let Cunliff read in them how he had become much more to Hirell Morgan than home and kin, than the scenes so loved from infancy, than the little chapel so venerated, the much revered ministers, the sweetest, most holy recollections of the past, than all these he was dearer, her eyes filled with tears of tender shame as they confessed how much, how very much dearer.

But they did confess it; and whether he felt as many a better man might have felt, a sense of his own unworthiness; or as many a worse man might have felt, exalted and purified by the confession, he could not answer her in words or by looks, but could only lift and touch her hand with his lips, and hold it almost timidly as they walked on in silence.

They were passing down an incline between banks, and under an arch, from which they emerged into a bit of wild, rocky scenery; a very small but very perfect imitation of

those little rifts or ravines one finds so often running down the slopes of the Welsh mountains, water running along the bottom, the banks on each side falling back a little, but reaching across to each other by means of tree-branches, and long shoots of shrubby spray, the home generally of some of the most beautiful of ferns.

It was a fernery Hirell looked on, and there was something in it that affected her strangely. Her eyes gleamed—

“Ah!” she said, “this is sweet. There is a place quite near our house just like it. I know where every one of these ferns can be found in it.”

Two or three minutes brought them to some outlying, but connected portion of the castle. Cunliff knocked gently, the door opened, and a gentleman stood before them, who immediately and very warmly welcomed them.

Hirell could not but notice with a secret thrill of pleasure, the deep, almost profound respect that Mr. Jarman showed in look, tone, and gesture, to her lover, in spite of the familiar tone of equality that marked his

words. It was the first opportunity she had enjoyed of estimating how the world looked upon the man who was so dear to her, and it was decisive.

Mr. Jarman led the way to a banqueting room, where the walls were decorated with pictures of great size, which instantly attracted Hirell's gaze, though she scarcely dared to venture to ask questions about them. Her heart was already full, too full for her to preserve the equanimity she desired; and now her head began to turn dizzy with the novelty of all about her, for she had never seen anything of the kind before.

Refreshments were on the table ready. No servants appeared, for none were needed; and the viands were so various, so full of delicacies for the appetite, and all so strange, that she felt she should be able to eat nothing, and began to wish for a quiet meal after the fashion of Bod Elian.

But Cunliff understood in part her difficulty; and in tending her, conveyed in an unobtrusive manner to her sufficient knowledge of the things offered to enable her

to enjoy herself and satisfy her hunger, for she soon began to discover she was hungry.

Mr. Jarman and Cunliff withdrew for a few minutes, to deal, as the latter said, with the business that had brought them together, and she was left alone.

The solitude was an immense relief. She rose, moved a few steps, as if to realise the feeling she was for the time once more free, then in a calmer mood began to study the pictures on the wall.

Cunliff returned alone, and said Mr. Jarman had given him *carte blanche* to take the young lady over the house without the annoyance of a companion.

"He seems a dear, charming person," said Hirell wistfully, as if hoping Cunliff would speak of their relations ; for she wanted now to know what she thought others must know of the goodness and nobleness of Mr. John Rymer.

Cunliff laughed and said,

"Oh yes, he's very well, as men go ;" but there was something that jarred upon Hirell ; it seemed to show so little response to the good steward's own feelings towards his friend.

They now went together into the place ; Cunliff directing her attention only to those things which a man of his own culture cared to speak of—the Roman mosaic let into the centre of the pavement of the entrance hall, and which had been found on the estate ; the rare armour, ranged along the walls of the inner saloon ; the marquetry, the rare china, bronzes, and articles of vertu in the splendid suite of reception rooms ; the pictures in the chambers, some of which he, in the innate delicacy that still survived in him when in presence of womanly purity, took care she should not see ; the frescoes in the billiard-room, the ball-room, and the music saloon, or theatre ; but Hirell, while listening with all possible attention, rapt at times in his words, when some fine thought dropped from him unconsciously, found her eyes drawn in spite of herself to the more visible and material splendours of the place.

She was trying to realize the life of the mistress of such a place, the liveried servants, the reception of the guests, the dresses, the jewels, the beauty, the youth, the distinction of the bright and happy ones assembled in

that exquisite drawing-room and alcove she had passed through, the government of so many people, the order required in so magnificent a home, and the result was that one bright vision after another kept pressing on through her eager and yearning brain, but leaving nothing clear or definite behind, except the sense of a lovely chaos.

One natural bit of pleasure, one quiet, pure bit of enjoyment stood out ever after to her as a remembrance of the eventful day. It was Cunliff's pause in the business of teaching, and explaining, and suggesting, when he discovered to his amusement that Hirell wanted him to show her how to play the game that he said was so fascinating—billiards. He did so. They spent perhaps ten minutes there together, laughing at every unlucky plunge of the cue from Hirell's charming hands, till the cloth was cut, and the bit of sunny, pleasant life ended—for ever, as far as these two were concerned.

The Picture Gallery delayed them some time, not in order that Hirell might receive her first lesson in the glories of art, here gloriously represented, but that after they had

walked through the entire length of the gallery she might return to look at a small sketch that Cunliff had drawn her attention to, with the remark,

“Look well at that. I will tell you some story about it by-and-bye.”

She had done so, and once gazing needed no other incentive, and he had some difficulty in drawing her away.

To this she now returned.

It was a woman's face, very lovely and tender, but its beauty did not strike Hirell as being more remarkable than that of many faces in the paintings she had already seen on the gallery walls. Like them it bore signs of rank and wealth. There was the rich circlet of jewels on the brow, the queenly carriage of the head, the gracious smile, yet though so like, how far different it was from all the others. Under the circlet, the artist had drawn on the gentle young forehead a little line, strange to see there. Under the cheerful, commanding eyes, a deep shade, that should have surely been only under eyes that were more used to tears than these could be ; and the long, raised lashes seemed almost to

quiver, as if in spite of the eyes' bright courage, they must presently fall in deathly weariness upon the pale cheek, and rest there never to rise more. The smiling lips had something very faint and ethereal about them, like those clouds that the sun in rising touches with rose colour, and leaves fading ; and the slender throat was so cunningly pourtrayed, that stately and noble as was its bearing, a subtle touch, shewing the tension of a vein or nerve, gave to it a tragic meaning ; a patience most heroic ; a pathetic weariness that seemed to show how in an instant if it could have liberty from that stern, brave will that supported it, it would, like a broken flower, hang down its head and die.

"You said I was not curious some hours ago, now you have quite cured me of that fault, so please tell me about this picture, of the lady whose face haunts me, and saddens me."

"Presently—presently — presently !" said Cunliff, with a half-laugh, as he took her away to the outside of the mansion, thence across a croquet ground to the base of the great keep, which now stood before them revealed in its

full and grand proportions, and in all the sad expression of a great age.

Many—many times had Hirell wondered to herself what had become of the servants. The strange solitude, amid the extreme freshness, and perfection of state, of all she had seen, was very striking,—almost at times to Hirell, mournful—without her exactly knowing why.

No servant even here was visible. Cunliff seemed to know and be prepared for everything. He took a great key from his pocket, opened a door high up, to which they ascended by a sloping platform (probably removed in time of war or siege), and taking Hirell's hand, led her in, re-closed the door, and they were in complete darkness.

"Are you frightened?" asked Cunliff, after a moment's pause, during which he felt her fingers tremble, and her breath come and go in short, stifled gasps.

"No," she said simply.

He made no response, except to re-open the door; then he lifted a trap door on the ground, and bade her look down.

She did so shudderingly, as he said,—

“A pretty piece of business was done down there, long ago, but by no ancestor of m—of my friend’s master; the castle then belonged to a boy, who lived here in the care of a relative, to whom he was ward, and by whom he was—so says tradition—pitilessly murdered in the depths here below.”

“Oh, shut it down—cover it up! I cannot bear to be near such places. Dear Mr. Rymer, this tower is horrible to me. Let us go?”

“Presently, Hirell, but I want you to see the prospect from the top. Strangers come here merely to see it. Mr. Jarman would never forgive our want of taste if—come!”

He took her hand, and led her by a winding stair, up and up, storey above storey, to the top, where in a moment Hirell felt repaid for all.

It was a scene to make an Englishman’s heart exult in the beauty and serenity of his country—the serenity meaning so much of peace, law, freedom, culture, that the beauty itself seemed almost to flow from them, rather than from the natural features of the landscape.

Hirell gazed for some time without speaking on woods and rising meadows, and leas and lanes all blooming and lustrous in the sunshine of May.

"How wonderful," she said soon, "that I should see it just at this most perfect time of all the year."

Then she began in a low voice repeating some lines of poetry in her own language, her eyes full of tender joy and admiration as they still looked far over the large fair prospect, her hand under his, on the little wall, trembling.

"What a pity I can't understand that," said Cunliff.

"O I can say it in English too," answered Hirell, a little proud for once of her learning: and then, with a deeper glow on her cheek, she repeated to him a translation of some lines from Davydd ab Gwilym's poem to the summer.

"Thou Summer! father of delight,
With thy dense spray and thickets deep;
Gemmed monarch, with thy rapt'rous light
Rousing thy subject glens from sleep;
Proud has thy march of triumph been,
Thou prophet prince of forest green!

Artificer of wood and tree,
Thou painter of unrivalled skill,
Who ever scattered gems like thee,
And gorgeous webs on park and hill,
Till vale and hill, with radiant dyes,
Become another paradise !”

For some minutes longer the hands on the little wall remained clasped in silence, very happy silence to Hirell.

“How many counties do you think can be seen from here ?” asked Cunliff.

“I cannot guess ; are there—four ?” said Hirell.

“Eleven.”

“And those mountains—— ?”

“Well, yes ;—true Welshwoman to fasten on them first !—they are the Berwyn mountains.”

Hirell gazed on them as if she felt her soul had wings to fly to them, and was poising itself to start, when her lover called her attention again.

“Do you see that wood far away on the slope of a great hill ?”

“Yes.”

“Do you see to the right of it—still at a great distance—the gleam of water ?”

"Yes."

"Turn still further to the right. Do you now see the church spire and village,—they are very faint?"

"Oh but I see them."

"Now finally turn in this direction, and you will have looked east, west, north and south, and you see the viaduct, with its long series of arches, over which a railway passes?"

"Yes: that is very plain."

"Within those limits, then, behold the possessions of the master of this place!"

"What, all those villages?—and farms?—and innumerable fields—and woods—and—"

"All!"

"And is he happy?"

There was a pause,—a deep silence,—then Cunliffe said,—

"I cannot answer that. He may be too great a fool to benefit by all that fortune has given or offers."

"Is he married?"

"I—I believe not."

"Well, that is a pity. I cannot fancy any one living single in a place like this. Can you? I should feel, if I were the single gen-

tleman among a crowd of servants in all this empty and roomy splendour, that fortune was laughing at me."

"You never heard of the irony of fortune, I suppose?"

"No: what does it mean?"

Cunliff did not speak for a few seconds, and then seemed to have forgotten the question.

"The wind blows cold here, so we must go down, else I had intended——"

He stopped, took her hand to guide her down the winding staircase, and in doing so their looks met.

All the way down those seemingly interminable steps, did Hirell ponder over that look,—but ponder vainly.

They went back, but entered at another door; and to Hirell's astonishment, they stood in a Gothic chapel; small, but of the most elegant proportions, and of the most delicately beautiful architecture.

Hirell stood as one ravished, gazing at the altar end, where above the altar stone was the one window of the place, of stained glass, now literally blazing and burning with molten colour, and sparkling gem-like effects, through the vividness of the sun outside.

"Come, Hirell," said Cunliff, with grave voice, and pre-occupied air, no longer thinking of her thoughts.

"Oh, but is it not good to be here? Let me stay here while you—you tell me what you said you would."

"The place strikes chill; you will feel it soon."

"Oh no—no! See!" and she sat herself down on a step, that formed a kind of dais for the altar. "It is so pleasant. Let me be here. You do not, cannot think, how happy I was to see what place you had brought me to last of all—last of all!"

She spoke with mournful sweetness, then suddenly remembering the very different interpretation Mr. Rymer might give to her words, rose hastily, and with a hot blush on her cheek, which she vainly strove to master, said—

"Perhaps it will be better to——"

"No; since you wish it, let it be so."

He made her sit down again, and sat by her side.

"You liked that picture—I mean the face of the lady?"

"Ah, yes ; surely it has a history ?"

"Did you ever hear the story of the Lady of Burleigh ?"

"No !"

"Not in Tennyson ?"

"Who is Tennyson ?"

Cunliff looked at her a moment, as if in astonishment, but immediately glossed over the incident, and said,—

"Well, that is a kind of impromptu painting, made from recollection only, of the lady in question, by another lady who knew her,—admired her,—loved her, and lamented her, so at least I was told when a boy, and that is all I know about the picture. I cannot from my own, or any other trustworthy knowledge, even say whether it does or does not, truly represent, or was intended to represent, the Lady of Burleigh. But the face is *the* face to me—and ever will be—that I have believed in. I think you will say so too when you hear the story."

He was holding her hand as he began to speak ; his eyes fixed now on her eyes, just for one single moment, then turning away, with a kind of affectation of carefulness, to

remember accurately the facts he had to recount.

“A young painter—an artist, as supposed—came to a certain village, and lodged in a certain house, where the daughter was a maiden of surpassing beauty. I often wonder, Hirell, whether or no surpassing yours.”

“That I am sure is no part of the story,” said Hirell.

“Is it not? I thought—Hirell, you confuse me when you look at me as if you saw right into my very soul.”

“Forgive me if——”

“Pooh, darling; I do but jest, though God knows I have little of mirth-material in me just now. Where was I?”

“At the lady’s beauty——”

“No, Hirell, at yours—if truth is above the world, as you Welsh people are always dining into one. Hearken:

“The painter was a quiet, unobtrusive, gentlemanly sort of person, and the affair took the usual course, and there was another pair of fools in the world.”

“Ah,—what do you deserve to speak so to me?” asked Hirell.

"Give me then that which I deserve. What is it? A kiss? Come, life is full of surprises. What if it were the last you were ever to give me?"

"Mr. Rymer!"

"Let us only imagine it the last for the moment. We might be killed by lightning, you know, like the lovers of which our story books tell us. Come, one kiss; as if it were to be the last."

There was such a mingling of the passionate, the tender, the stern, and the pathetic in his look and words, that Hirell, bewildered, knew not for the moment what to do.

"I will be bribed," said he, "or I tell no story."

The kiss was given by a trembling lip, cold as ice,—and a lip full of fire and determined purpose.

Hirell drew off a little from him, hardly knowing that she did so; but he noticed it, and went on at once with his story, with new vivacity.

"The young lady accepted the artist's love, of course, even while he told her he had little of the world's goods. They were

married ; he took her away to go to their own future home. As they went, he had a fancy to show her one of the grand mansions of the country,—the seat of an English noble. They went, just as we have gone to-day, only I am no English noble.”

“God forbid !” ejaculated Hirell—and so softly that she must have fancied she spoke only to herself—but he heard.

“He took her through the gardens—shewed her the environing woods—the armorial bearings on the gate—took her through the stately reception rooms, and galleries—but—”

“But what ?” said Hirell, in a tone that seemed to be intended to be playful, but was obviously under some inexplicable constraint.

“The young wife—the beautiful maiden could see none of these things for something else that she saw.”

Again he stopped as if wilfully.

“And that was ?” suggested Hirell, softly.

“That her painter-husband was lost to her in a single moment—as by the glance of her eye—which saw forms bending humbly on every side before him—and when she turned

in trembling wonder and affright to ask what all this meant, he simply said to her—

“ ‘ All this is thine ! ’ ”

“ O how sweet ! How beautiful ! ”

“ Very. But beauty is apt to be short-lived—even this beauty was so. The lady was much shaken by the news. No wonder. The life she had lived, and the life she was to live were divided by an awful gulf. Do you not think so ? ”

“ Yes,” said Hirell, sadly. “ Poor lady ! ”

“ What would you have done, Hirell ? ”

“ Asked my husband to let me trust everything to his love and to God, and asked both to forgive me when I should fail. ”

“ He did not wait for her to ask. ”

“ Ah, no. One like him would not ! ”

“ He cheered her, quieted her, brought peace back into her soul. She accepted her duties gallantly, fulfilled them charmingly, bore him children, won everybody’s love, and then—”

His voice ceased. The mournfulness of the tone of his last words remained like an echo in Hirell’s heart, and she too was silent.

She could not tell what passed during the next few minutes, as she looked around, as

she thought of the behaviour and looks of the man by her side, as she thought of herself, and the resemblance—could it be accidental?—between the story just told, and her own story, so far as she yet knew it, even to the journey, and to such a place as this.

A little thrill or shiver ran through her, and she said in a piteous voice,

“I am cold!” and was about to rise. But Cunliff said to her,

“Do you not wish to hear the end?”

Strange to say, Hirell’s absorbing interest in the story of the Lady of Burleigh could not prevent her forgetting all about it during those few eventful moments which passed after Cunliff had suspended his narrative. But now brought back to it, she said simply—

“If you please!”

“Borne down by her secret sense of her unfitness, she sickened and died within a very few years—three or four, I believe—in spite of all that the tenderest love could do for her. That is the story of the picture?”

“And of nothing more?” demanded Hirell, a change passing over her face.

"What more can there be?"

"I ask you that."

Again there was the little shiver ; and then the eyes shut for a moment, then again opened and dilated as she went on, and said—

"Are you John Rymer—and such as I have thought you?"

"I was John Rymer Cunliff, a plain English gentleman ; I am Sir John Cunliff, and this place is *mine* ! and all I have shown you."

Did he purposely use words that Hirell could not but instantly contrast with those other words, "All this is *thine*"—or was it accidental ? Whatever it was it did its work.

"Hirell," he began, "I am here to-day with you to tell you the truth that it concerns us both to know. Listen to me, I entreat. I have done wrong. Shall I remedy that by more wrong ? I have led an evil, indulgent life ; that you have cured for me. Never forget that your God, whether he be my God or no, will reward you—He must. My rank, my tastes, my education, my duties, all now impel me to a public

career. What that involves for my wife, in all sorts of ways—”

“We shall be late, Mr. Rymer,” said Hirell, rising hurriedly.

“Pardon me, I will but detain you for a very brief space. In this place—look round you—nay look! and believe that I feel something at least of the religious awe you feel—here then, in the eye and ear of God I swear to you that I love you dearly, that in my soul I believe I never can cease to love you, and that I would take you, if you were a beggar in the street—if being what you are, you could also be that which—”

“Yes, yes. I understand. Spare me—now—if—”

She caught his hand convulsively, and he, mistaking the cause—for she was, she thought, about to swoon and fall, cried out passionately,

“Darling!”

But the word, the tone, and the look revived her in time; and she without heat, almost for the moment without agitation, removed his hands from her, and said in a kind of hollow whisper,

"We shall be late! Think how far we have to go. We shall be late. Oh!"

Nature could bear no more. She sat down again to avert the danger of his touch or a fall, and bending herself all of a heap, gave way to all the frenzies and agony of her young soul.

"Hirell, I am pledged to marry you. If I cannot redeem the pledge itself, you must let me do the best I can. I shall settle on you an independent fortune."

A cry, followed by a light, hysteric laugh, rang through the chapel, but was stopped in a minute or so; and the bending form was again still as death.

"Hirell, I do not expect you to agree with me to-day. I only want you to listen. Your father! Think of his poverty. Hugh—think of his genius, difficulties, and future career. Think of yourself—mistress of yourself—free to move as you please—live as you please—where you please. Come, dearest, do not believe the day is to set in eternal gloom because the clouds are heavy for a little while. What am I? A man burdened with many follies, and I fear some vices. Can we not be still friends?"

Not just now ;—but when the first bitterness shall have passed off ? Consider ! How much of all that our marriage might have given you might yet be yours—Ah, how much you need still !”

He stopped—Sir John Cunliff stopped as if aware of the abyss on the very edge of which he stood, and looked down.

Hirell saw that abyss too—he was sure of it.

But she like himself was silent ! And it is possible he drew auguries, evil as they were vague, of a possible future from the silence.

At last she lifted her head, and in so doing Cunliff saw the ruin he had wrought already only too plainly there visible. And before he could speak to assuage the anguish he had created, he saw Hirell’s face confronting his own, fearless, proud as he had never before seen her ; her eyes searching through his with a kind of scornful light that seemed to burn them ;—then in deep silence she rose, her strength apparently recovered, and was about to leave the place alone.

“Hirell !” and Cunliff laid his hand upon her arm.

"Sir!" she said, turning coldly, while every limb shook as with ague.

"You shall not leave me thus—by Heaven you shall not!"

"What—what do you now wish?" she said in great fear, and every word spoken with difficulty, as though her nervous system was suddenly paralysed.

"That you try to think over in a calm and kindly spirit, what I have said to you."

"I will!"

"Thanks. I will then say no more to you now, we must both try to think no more now, or how shall we get over the journey back?"

"I shall go alone."

"Not while I live to prevent you. Hirell, this is not the way to deal with me. I love you, and honour you, wish to do all that man can do to extricate us both from a false position; but if you begin to contend—to fight—to—"

"No—no—no. You will take me home, and by the time?"

"I will, on my soul."

"And—and—let me—let me, do—yes—"

what you said—try to forget all this—till we—I—reach home !”

“ I will. And, if you wish it, will ride outside in both the vehicles, so that you shall not again be alone with me. Oh, Hirell ! can you not trust me ?”

“ Yes.”

The journey was in effect spent throughout in the deepest silence. Cunliff forgot his offer to ride outside, and Hirell’s instinct warned her to shun every kind of antagonism. Cunliff spoke only when a favourable opportunity offered, and Hirell invariably replied to him either by a single word, or “yes” or “no,” or by a slight bend of the head. She had neither heart nor inclination to play a part—to seem to throw off the humiliation put upon her—all she desired was to draw herself shrinkingly into the corner as far as possible from her companion, and to be allowed to keep silent, so that when she wept he might not know of it, nor she be again made to weep by him when the tears were awhile driven back upon their source.

He often saw her lips moving, and tor-

tured himself by fancies of what the words might be.

They were for the most part little other than—

“Father! Father! Kezia! Kezia! when shall I reach you? When?—when?”

Bod Elian was reached at last.

She let him ascend the hill with her, though her whole frame quivered at the thought of her father seeing him.

But she again promised him to think over all he had said, and then as if moved by some strong revulsion of feeling that she could not control, she tried to say a few kindly parting words, then broke down, when Cunliff said, as his last words—

“When all this is over, I shall again see you to ask and earn your forgiveness:” but when he made as he would kiss her, she put him aside, and said—

“Good-night!” and disappeared in the darkness.

Was it fancy that made him think he heard a cry that curdled his blood, only a minute or two afterwards? It was low, penetrating, but full of such concentrated essence of all mortal

suffering—at least, so his conscience received it—that it rang in his ears, in his heart, in his brain, all the way to the hotel, and through the live-long night, which for him passed without a moment of sleep.

CHAPTER III.

HIRELL'S RETURN.

ELIAS had indeed returned in an anxious and despairing state of mind. The efforts which the Reverend Ephraim Jones and himself had made to discover Hugh, had been as unavailing as they had been injurious to his home affairs and to his purse. To continue the search longer would have been simply ruinous to him. He had parted from the minister with a despair on his face so settled and deep, that Ephraim Jones had considered it his duty to rebuke him ; but broke down ignominiously in the attempt, at the mildness with which Elias received his lecture. The accounts he heard of Hugh's manner of living from the people to whom he owed money, and therefore probably exaggerated accounts, were such as to fill one so inexperi-

enced in town life, and so austere in his own, with dismay and deep anger.

On reaching Bod Elian, and hearing from Kezia of Hirell's absence, he sat like one overtaken by a storm, and not knowing which way to turn for shelter. He did not reproach Kezia in words, but looked at her in a manner that filled her heart with remorse and forboding.

These two sat waiting for Hirell through the long hours of the May afternoon, never speaking to each other, but going in turn to the door to look for her. Elias made no attempt to work, his whole soul was in expectancy; he knew he could not work; he would not pretend; he knew too perhaps how great a punishment it was to Kezia to see him thus doing nothing, but sitting, apparently unconscious of his great fatigue, grimly waiting.

Kezia was the first to hear the footsteps coming, and watched Elias growing gradually conscious of them too. They were the footsteps of a single person and were familiar to them.

Elias rises and goes to the door, opens

it, and sees his daughter's form alone at the door, while another form is dimly revealed in the moonlight retreating along the wall.

"Hirell Morgan," he says to her, "is this how you employ your time while I am away?"

She stands still without attempting to enter, and he hears her sigh heavily.

"It is coming back to such a home, no doubt," thinks Elias. Then he says aloud and very sternly—

"So the man avoids me, Hirell?"

"No, father," answers she in a languid faint voice, "he would have seen you and spoken to you if he had heard you had come back; but I—I saw no good in such a meeting."

He pauses a minute, perplexed and troubled greatly at the strangeness of her voice, then moves back as a sign to her to come in.

She walks slowly across the kitchen, bringing with her fresh odours of the spring evening, and stands by the fire holding her hand towards it and shivering. The two look at her in some bewilderment at seeing her show no fear of her father's anger, and they see

that her face is very pale, her eyes look large, bright, and very sadly thoughtful.

Suddenly while they are looking at her she turns to her father.

"Father, any news of Hugh?"

"None, Hirell," returned Elias, "it seems that *he* is lost to us."

"No, father, I think not," says Hirell; then looking down deeper and deeper into the fire, she says—"Do you remember my once asking you to let me go away from home, father? Do you remember how much we always wished—poor Hugh and I—to see the world, to see what it was like, and what life was like away from here. I have not been very many miles to-day, father: but—but—"

She sobbed out, and Elias approached her in alarm.

"Hirell!"

"But my journey has been too much for me, I—I am weary, I want to see and hear no more of anything—of any one away from here. Yes, and to forget what I have seen—to forget what I have seen."

"Hirell," said Elias, "I desire to hear

where you have spent this day, and how you have spent it."

"Mr. Rymer came here this morning, the gentleman we have known as Mr. Rymer," answered Hirell, speaking in a quiet but strained voice, "Kezia has told you what he wanted—have you not done so, Kezia? I went with him thinking that when I came back I should tell you the time for our marriage was arranged, and that if father returned with good news of Hugh, we should all be very joyful together."

Elias looked at her searchingly, Hirell returned his look with steady eyes.

"We looked over a beautiful estate," said Hirell, "we talked a great deal of the owner, Mr. Rymer showed me how great a man he must be, and then how much responsibility and care would fall to the wife of such a man, and how no one but a lady born and bred should aspire to such an honour. He made me to agree with him, and then at last it came out that Rymer himself was the great man—owner of the place—that he is Sir John Cunliff."

Kezia could scarcely take in so much

romance as this all at once. She sat gazing in fixed astonishment at Hirell. Elias went to his daughter, and took her hand.

"Go on, Hirell, tell me all," he said.

"He convinced me of the truth of what he said. Oh, yes, he convinced me!" answered Hirell.

"Why has he chosen so strange and unstraightforward a plan for doing this?"

They still looked into each other's eyes. At last Hirell's filled and overflowed, and her lips quivered.

"My father," said she, "does this matter to us who are parted from him for ever? Is it not between him and his God?"

"Have we done with him for ever, Hirell?"

"When I say my prayers to-night, father, I shall try to say 'I have done with this man,' with the same calmness and resignation with which good Christians at their death-bed say, 'I have done with life,' though mine—mine—mine are the harder words, and in saying them I think I say the others too."

"Kezia, she is faint," said Elias, "help

her to her room, I will see you, my child, before I go to bed myself."

They went out together ; and Elias sat himself down alone, and life was more bitter and mysterious to him than ever.

CHAPTER IV.

GONE.

THE next evening Sir John Cunliff received the following letter—

“SIR,

“You desired me to think over our interview calmly before answering you. Not calmly, but in as peaceful and forgiving a spirit as after long prayer God gives me, I have thought of your actions on this dreadful day just past; and now in the night—not calmly as you requested—but not I trust with unchristian passion—I sit down to write to you. I wish first to inform you that I have not made known to my father or any one, the whole truth of this day. I feel no need to do so—I feel no need of being protected from you more than you have protected me by

showing me that which you really are ; so believe me, sir, and be thankful for it, this poor, labouring household of God's elect, of which I am so unworthy a member, shall never know how cruelly, how treacherously its peace and honour have been struck at through me. Thank God they sleep, and I, only I am awake, bearing my sorrow by myself as best I may.

“ My answer, sir, is only this—I will never of my own will see you more in this world. I need to take no oath, to bind myself by no vow, the resolve that comes from humble prayer and conquered passion is sufficient in God's eyes. Oh ! let it be in yours, and do not try me. Farewell, Mr. Rymer, I use the name I loved once more. May God forgive and bless you, and guide you to His kingdom, where, if we meet, humble will be my place compared to yours,

“ Your servant,

“ HIRELL MORGAN.”

On the day after he had received the letter, Cunliff was at Capel Iltyd. Here he heard news which kept him from continuing his journey to Bod Elian.

Hirell was away from home.

Her father had taken her away, no one knew whither.

Hugh had not been heard of. Special prayer had been offered at the chapel for Elias.

Cunliff in a few hours was once more at Llansaintfraid, and there took his place in the night train for London.

CHAPTER V.

NEWS OF THE PRODIGAL.

HIRELL had been absent some days, and Elias back at Bod Elian, when he received the following letter from the Reverend Ephraim Jones :—

“DEAR FRIEND,—

“The prodigal is found. Fain would he arise and go to you, who are to him as his earthly father, but that severe sickness holds him to his bed, from whence it is doubtful whether he will ever arise. The physician and death are in combat for his body, and myself and Satan for his soul. The manner in which I discovered him you shall hear of another time. His spirit is full of despair ;

his bones are almost through his skin. This night will perhaps decide his fate. Wait till you hear again, to-morrow.

“ Yours in commiseration,

“ EPHRAIM JONES.”

Elias rose up from the reading dry-eyed and silent. He went out to his work, but found no comfort in it. The emerald fields, the flowery coppices of May, the skylark letting down from the impenetrable blue distance a faint pathway of song, that seem thronged, like Jacob's ladder, with heavenly company—the rich-voiced thrush, whose breast has become dyed as with the rich flickering shade and sunshine that plays over it through the dancing leaves of her home-tree—the tiny, thrilling linnet—all seem to Elias this morning to be singing the songs of Hugh. He strides through the furrows, his hard hands to the plough, and as he reaches a corner where a cluster of young fruit trees drop their blossoms on to the brown mould, his eyes rest upon a long, broken bough that lies across his path. Its bright leaves and fresh white blossoms are drooping and dying. He turns his

plough sharply, as if his eyes had found in the sight an emblem of Hugh's fate.

The minister's words, "the prodigal is found," are constantly before him. Found! and what has Elias to welcome him with?—neither rich garments to put on him, nor fatted calf to kill. He must do his meanest labourers' work to win him common bread. Prodigal! of what has he been prodigal? Did not Elias send him portionless from his father's house? In his toilsome progress he again comes to the bough with its withering blossoms, and the word "broken—broken" issues from his stern, compressed lips.

"I knew he was less strong than Hirell, yet I sent him out, and kept my own—and kept my own."

All day he toiled in the sun, and in the evening was somewhat comforted to look back on the stony field, and see that he had done the work of two men. The birds were singing as he came home, but Elias found nothing but sadness in their burthen. He thought of how Hugh whistled or sang as he came home at his side, and how their singing and

all the sounds of the evening used to seem to become a part of his song.

Would he never walk by him again across these fields in the sunset, lifting his rich, sweet voice, which the echoes sent back, as if proud to repeat such music? The sunset was as beautiful as on those last year summer evenings, when the brothers returned together from their labour. There was a silent cry in the heart of Elias, to which the birds seemed to give voice, till he forgot it was from himself, and could almost fancy they really sang them to him reproachfully as he went along—instead of which it was his heart that gave words to their voices, which seemed to cry—“Elias, Elias, what hast thou done with him? Where is the sweet musician?”

In the evening, several times his head was turned sharply towards the door, at slight noises. If Hugh were to die, could the moment of his death be to Elias as all other moments?—would he not be allowed to know it by any sign or warning?

In the night, when he was asleep, his rest was troubled by sounds of music, piercingly sweet. He dreamed he saw his father beside

his bed, and that he asked him what they were, and he answered them with a stern voice—"Turn to your sleep, Elias ; the burthen that I left you is removed. The music you now hear is your brother playing in God's choir."

Elias went out early to his ploughing, feeling very lonely in the glory of sunrise, as he thought he might be the only one of his father's house left for it to shine upon. He came in his laborious turns upon the broken bough, and found all its blossoms withered.

A few minutes before the letters arrived, he stood in the little post-office garden, looking down the winding road. When he saw the postman's white horse galloping across the bridge, he gazed at him as if he expected to see some sign about him of the kind of news he brought. He came close ; one of his bags whirled through the air, and fell in the midst of the cabbage bed in the post-office garden, and the white horse dashed on.

Some miners were waiting for their letters, and Elias watched them as the bag was sorted—almost passionately envious of those

who received what they had come for, and full of pity for such as turned away empty-handed.

“Elias Morgan,” called the postmaster.

Elias took the packet held out to him, and turning quickly from all inquisitive looks, went homewards with his prize.

It was from the minister, and these were the contents, which Elias as usual read aloud to Kezia :—

“DEAR FRIEND,—

“My hearty supplications, and the prayers which I know you have offered up for him at Bod Elan, have prevailed with the Lord, who has given your brother back into my hands out of the valley of the shadow of death. He is not yet safe ; he lies, as it were, upon the slippery bank ; but as strongly as one mortal may hold another, will I hold him for you, Elias. I will now tell you how it came to pass that I was permitted thus to find and succour him even at the eleventh hour. My mission for the last week has been to preach in the place of a well-meaning, but feeble brother, at ——— Street, a crowded,

poor and sinful neighbourhood, as doubtless you may have heard. Large bills, certifying my intent and the subjects of my discourse, had been displayed for some days previous to my arrival in the locality ; and I make no doubt but that the unfortunate lad saw my name on them, and was moved, not by its associations with the Master I serve, but by its carnal associations with home and kindred, to enter into the little tabernacle, that he might see me and hear my voice. Probably he intended to depart as he came in, unnoticed by me—but even as the presence of the nightingale is made known by her song, so was his betrayed to me by the peculiar power given him by the only Giver of those gifts of the spirit.

“The day of our meeting was Saturday, the busiest in the week with the tradesmen of that tinsel and gingerbread booth of vanity fair ; and, owing to this accident, it transpired that the young organist, a shoemaker’s apprentice, was not at the chapel. When, therefore, having grown warm with my discourse, and wishing to take rest, I called for a hymn, no response was made to me, till

presently one of the congregation whispered to me the state of the case, whereat I was vexed in spirit, for melody is as healthful to the soul as dew to your fields. ‘Brethren,’ said I, ‘is there not amongst you *one* whose hands have cunning to do our missing brother’s duty? Can *no* one play upon this instrument?’

“So long a silence ensued, that I was about to tell them to sing without accompaniment, when a slight movement took place among those near to the door, and in a few moments, without seeing the person, who had just seated himself before it, the sounds of the organ rose, and rolled with a vast power and most melting sweetness; and over our heads there began, as it were, a mighty converse—in which human and divine voices seemed mingled. It was to me as if a band of angels had come rushing down to meet and to embrace the ascending, but still chained souls; and that the spirits of earth and the spirits of Heaven did for the time hold passionate communion with each other, uttering piercing complaint, and profound and tender comfort—deep-voiced despair, and clear, thrilling whispers of hope

—which seemed to be all rending the air at once, in a harmony so grand, so tumultuous, I could but think thus at the Judgment Day, men and spirits shall meet.

“The music ceased, and I bethought me of the master-hand to whom we were indebted for moments of such exalted emotion.

“‘We thank thee, brother,’ I said, looking at the curtains that concealed the lower part of the organ ; and not unwilling to take advantage of the incident, according to my wont, to stimulate the attention, and keep alive the curiosity of the very rough congregation that these special services call together. ‘Who art thou? For fain would I know the name and calling of one so gifted by the Lord.’

“Without answer—without a look towards me, a form rose up and went down the steps leading from the organ. The form so slim and slight, and now so thin ; the motion of the arm, the pale downcast face—Elias, I knew it—I knew him. I understood the power of the music—it was that lost misguided youth—thy brother. I saw him hastening towards the chapel door, and was moved to call out his name in a loud voice. He only

hastened the more—I was determined he should not escape me.

“ ‘Brethren,’ I said, ‘I have much to say to you. My evening’s mission is not fulfilled, but stopped midway by another. What man of you having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost until he find it? Such a one I go to seek. Brother Robert will pray with you the while. I may return presently.’

“I left the chapel, and went in search. I was in time to see his form again, before he turned the street corner, and hastened after him. Before I reached within a few yards of him he had heard my hurrying and somewhat heavy footstep and turned. Seeing me, he fled; but speed was given me to bear him yet in sight, which I did for the length of several small streets. At last I saw him stop and enter a house, and then saw him no more, and neither could I remember with any certainty when I came to the spot which house, in the row it was that he had gone into. I therefore took note of the name and position of the buildings, went back to the chapel, and

brought our meeting to a more decent conclusion.

“Early in the morning I went again to the place to seek him. I enquired at three houses without discovering that any such person as I described lodged there. At a fourth, I obtained tidings of the wanderer, and sad tidings too, friend Elias. A woman as dark of aspect and almost as loud voiced as a thunder cloud, began to rail at him as soon as I pronounced his name. ‘Lodge here?’ quoth she; ‘a wheedling young swindler, I reckon he lodges at the bottom of the Thames by this time—anything with some folks to cheat honest, hardworking people of their due.’ She then bade me come up to her young lodger’s room, and witness for myself whether it was not left by one who was bidding farewell to life as well as to it. And truly, the sight of letters in your handwriting, my friend, in small pieces on the floor, and sheets of written music torn as by a passionate hand that wildly seeks to silence life itself, as it silences these evidences of life—gave me the gloomiest forebodings.

“I picked up some of the scraps of paper, thinking to find a clue to his trouble, but was

as prompt to put them down again, as if they had been covered with plague spots. My very hands felt blistered. My cheeks grew hot. Then my heart was moved within me to a transport of indignation against the iniquity of our time and state, that allows iniquity to sow broadcast its seed through our streets and waysides, so that our young and undefiled country children, when they come up full of hope and belief of great things in store for them—pure, simple-hearted, unsuspecting children—find harlotry in silks and satins, vice no longer shame-faced, but triumphant, and systematically fed by a thousand different agencies. What wonder then if they cannot see and understand the hideous truth beneath, till it is too late to profit by the knowledge? O for the days of our Puritan forefathers! But they will yet come again, and then, God willing, we will make one clean sweep of the whole, and breathe once more the pure air of an uncorrupted dwelling—this dear old England, which has been, and shall again be the abode and dowry of the Saints. In God's time! Yea, in God's own time!

“I made the woman promise to send me

word instantly by a private messenger, should her lodger return. But I could not sleep, Elias, that night, for thinking of the lad and thee ; and so I got up and walked the streets for some hours, obeying first this thought, then that, but had to return empty-handed to my poor lonely bereaved wife ; who by this time had, I verily believe, transferred all the hidden away love of her heart for the child we lost, to thy brother, and lamented my every failure, as if Hugh were indeed our son. ‘ Woman,’ I said to her once, ‘ am I this lad’s keeper ?’ for she began almost to persuade me the guilt and misery lay all at my door—that I had not more and better looked after him.

“ Next day I went again to the lodging ; the same the day after ; and yet again on the third day, when I was later than I had intended, and so evening had come. As I approached I heard the high-pitched voice of the woman sounding angrily from above ; a word or two reached me, and they seemed sweeter than the songs of angels. I ascended the stairs as quickly and as lightly as my heaviness of body permitted, and stood out-

side the half-open door to listen, glad of the rest, for I was somewhat out of breath.

“ ‘ And if you ain’t come to pay me, what are you come for ? ’ the woman screamed out.

“ Elias, I will not tell you what the lad said, or was trying to say, but I understood partly then, and the rest afterwards. He had resisted suicide—had fled from the tempter-devil’s last fitting blandishment—had thought of you, Kezia, Hirell, me ; and so in his extremity had run, literally run through the darkening streets in the fear that his better mood might pass away ; and thus he had come back like a poor hunted hare to his form, knowing not where else to get even a crust of bread.

“ Every bit of clothing beyond what bare decency required, he had pawned and sold, and the lad was literally starving ; yet he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat, and no man gave unto him, or was willing to give.

“ I went in, pushed aside the brawling virago, and went to Hugh, who was supporting himself while confronting her, against the corner of a table ; his head drooping in spite

word instantly by a private messenger, should her lodger return. But I could not sleep, Elias, that night, for thinking of the lad and thee ; and so I got up and walked the streets for some hours, obeying first this thought, then that, but had to return empty-handed to my poor lonely bereaved wife ; who by this time had, I verily believe, transferred all the hidden away love of her heart for the child we lost, to thy brother, and lamented my every failure, as if Hugh were indeed our son. ‘ Woman,’ I said to her once, ‘ am I this lad’s keeper ?’ for she began almost to persuade me the guilt and misery lay all at my door—that I had not more and better looked after him.

“Next day I went again to the lodging ; the same the day after ; and yet again on the third day, when I was later than I had intended, and so evening had come. As I

approached I heard the high-pitched voice of the woman sounding angrily from above ; a word or two reached me, and they seemed sweeter than the songs of angels. I ran up the stairs as quick-

side
rest
are
to
to
od!
soul
my.
y own
ver of
g more
Then
unhappy
that he
ht; and
beauty of
the won-
o; of the
his young
sement he
g—but for



of a certain rigidity and uprightness of his frame ; his face shrivelled and ghastly, full of misery and despair ; and yet, Elias, there was a kind of mocking smile upon it, fearful to behold, as though he rather looked on like a bystander, amused at the pretence of a struggle betwixt life and death, between God and Satan, and waited in a strange patience the issue.

“ But I sent that damnable smile out of his face pretty soon, I can tell you. This was as well as I can remember our first salutations, when I had sent the woman out and locked the door.

“ ‘ Hugh !’

“ ‘ Well.’

“ ‘ Is it well ? Dare you say it is well, with that friend at your elbow ?’

“ He turned hastily, and seeing no one, said—

“ ‘ What friend ? I see no friend !’

“ I did not choose to notice the touch of bitterness in the last few words, and the low, half stifled sigh that accompanied them.

“ ‘ Look again, young man,’ said I, and in no gentle accents. ‘ He is there, whispering

even now in your ear, and bidding you keep his whisperings from me. O, your friend and I have had many a tussle. The devil, Hugh, is behind you ; and I bid you kneel with me now, and let us try which of us, he or I, has the best right to you !

“ He stared, and seemed half inclined to laugh.

“ ‘ Down on your knees—down before God ! Ask Him pardon, while I, too, offer my soul in prayer !’

“ I said no more, but knelt.

“ He stood still ; stiff, silent, and gloomy.

“ I prayed aloud : first to God on my own account, that He would forgive whatever of remissness I had shown in not watching more closely the youth given to my charge. Then I asked for power to speak, that this unhappy sinner by my side should understand that he was yet precious in his Father’s sight ; and then I poured forth all I felt of the beauty of the life thou hadst taught him, of the wondrous gift I myself was witness to ; of the temptations to which I supposed his young spirit had given way ; of the chastisement he had received and was then enduring—but for

what? Why, that he might yearn once more for innocence, pardon, and peace: and I was about to conclude with words of promise, when he stopped me.

"I had known for some time that he was beginning to be moved by my words, or rather by God's Holy Spirit that moved me, and I felt as though I could have struggled then, and successfully, for a soul ten thousand million times more evil than his; but as I was about to finish, as I said, with words of Divine promise, he gasped out hoarsely rather than spake the word 'Stop!'—came to my side in a terrible silence, knelt down as one possessed might do, while I, though I said nothing, marvelled greatly, and looked at him, for perhaps a full quarter of a minute or so.

"'My son!' I said, at last, feeling truly as though he were bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh.

"And my voice, I suppose, getting somewhat shaky, the lad could bear no more, but fell into my arms as I opened them, and cried on my breast like a child.

"He would not let me stir, even to get food, till he had told me his whole story, which I

am sure he told me truly, excusing nothing—concealing nothing, except the shame that I saw overpowered every other emotion, and at times threatened to affect his very wits.

“That story I do not propose to tell thee, Elias, unless thou expressly wishest it. It will be a great comfort to him, if thou canst forgive, and take him to thee unknowing the particulars. I advise thy doing so.

“Friend Elias, the lad greatly needs comfort. His very life depends upon it. So let me say this : he has done nothing to prevent him from yet going forth again into the world, with a renewed heart, and strengthened frame, and becoming a true and shining light.

“He is now at home with us ; but I see he must remain no longer than is indispensably necessary, or the poor wife will complain she loses a second son when he goes. Expect us, therefore, soon.

“Ever thy friend,

“EPHRAIM JONES.”

—which seemed to be all rending the air at once, in a harmony so grand, so tumultuous, I could but think thus at the Judgment Day, men and spirits shall meet.

“The music ceased, and I bethought me of the master-hand to whom we were indebted for moments of such exalted emotion.

“‘We thank thee, brother,’ I said, looking at the curtains that concealed the lower part of the organ ; and not unwilling to take advantage of the incident, according to my wont, to stimulate the attention, and keep alive the curiosity of the very rough congregation that these special services call together. ‘Who art thou ? For fain would I know the name and calling of one so gifted by the Lord.’

“Without answer—without a look towards me, a form rose up and went down the steps leading from the organ. The form so slim and slight, and now so thin ; the motion of the arm, the pale downcast face—Elias, I knew it—I knew him. I understood the power of the music—it was that lost misguided youth—thy brother. I saw him hastening towards the chapel door, and was moved to call out his name in a loud voice. He only

hastened the more—I was determined he should not escape me.

“ ‘Brethren,’ I said, ‘I have much to say to you. My evening’s mission is not fulfilled, but stopped midway by another. What man of you having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost until he find it? Such a one I go to seek. Brother Robert will pray with you the while. I may return presently.’

“I left the chapel, and went in search. I was in time to see his form again, before he turned the street corner, and hastened after him. Before I reached within a few yards of him he had heard my hurrying and somewhat heavy footstep and turned. Seeing me, he fled; but speed was given me to bear him yet in sight, which I did for the length of several small streets. At last I saw him stop and enter a house, and then saw him no more, and neither could I remember with any certainty when I came to the spot which house in the row it was that he had gone into. I therefore took note of the name and position of the buildings, went back to the chapel, and

brought our meeting to a more decent conclusion.

“Early in the morning I went again to the place to seek him. I enquired at three houses without discovering that any such person as I described lodged there. At a fourth, I obtained tidings of the wanderer, and sad tidings too, friend Elias. A woman as dark of aspect and almost as loud voiced as a thunder cloud, began to rail at him as soon as I pronounced his name. ‘Lodge here?’ quoth she; ‘a wheedling young swindler, I reckon he lodges at the bottom of the Thames by this time—anything with some folks to cheat honest, hardworking people of their due.’ She then bade me come up to her young lodger’s room, and witness for myself whether it was not left by one who was bidding farewell to life as well as to it. And truly, the sight of letters in your handwriting, my friend, in small pieces on the floor, and sheets of written music torn as by a passionate hand that wildly seeks to silence life itself, as it silences these evidences of life—gave me the gloomiest forebodings.

“I picked up some of the scraps of paper, thinking to find a clue to his trouble, but was

as prompt to put them down again, as if they had been covered with plague spots. My very hands felt blistered. My cheeks grew hot. Then my heart was moved within me to a transport of indignation against the iniquity of our time and state, that allows iniquity to sow broadcast its seed through our streets and waysides, so that our young and undefiled country children, when they come up full of hope and belief of great things in store for them—pure, simple-hearted, unsuspecting children—find harlotry in silks and satins, vice no longer shame-faced, but triumphant, and systematically fed by a thousand different agencies. What wonder then if they cannot see and understand the hideous truth beneath, till it is too late to profit by the knowledge? O for the days of our Puritan forefathers! But they will yet come again, and then, God willing, we will make one clean sweep of the whole, and breathe once more the pure air of an uncorrupted dwelling—this dear old England, which has been, and shall again be the abode and dowry of the Saints. In God's time! Yea, in God's own time!

“I made the woman promise to send me

resided for the last month, and there he had made arrangements to stay for the rest of the summer. Till his mother's death Brockhurst would not really be his own ; and he had taken the Rookery Farm on lease, intending to go on with certain experiments which the careful old-world agriculturist, who was his mother's foreman, looked grave over when being tried on her property. So the young man took up his residence at the hooded house down the avenue, and went to work as if he had all his fortune to make.

As the two houses were so near, this was much wondered at in Nytimber ; and another reason besides anxiety about his new farm was hinted at by certain wiseacres for his having left the comforts of Brockhurst and his invalid mother for the damp old Rookery place. It was reported that Mrs. Chamberlayne had had a poor relation thrown suddenly upon her—a very pretty girl—but so humble and so poor, so beneath Mr. Robert in every respect, that his mother, who knew there had once been a foolish fancy for her in his mind, had judged it best to encourage him in his whim of living at his new tenancy.

The pretty smart maids, whose pleasant faces and bright ribbons made the passages of oak, and the many ivied doorways of Brockhurst more lively and homely still, were constantly flitting to and from the hooded house with little notes and messages to Mrs. Payne, the old woman who lived there, concerning Mr. Robert's comforts. Every morning there was something to be sent over—his garden lounging chair—a new magazine, a bunch of lilac for the hall, or a dish of young peas, at each of which attentions Mrs. Payne murmured inwardly. Had she not kept house for old Farmer Stubbes, who held the farm before Mr. Robert? Had she no peas and lilacs in the Rookery garden? What need then for such litter from Brockhurst? And as for cooking, she thought it time enough when Mr. Robert complained for his mother to interfere, sending those 'tossed offjades' over every hour of the day, to hinder all the men about the place. It was all their tale-bearing, Mrs. Payne declared, that made the lady of Brockhurst so over-anxious. If she could have got over to the Rookery herself she could have seen how comfortable things really were for her son,

but, of course, poor thing, that was impossible.

It was impossible—not on account of Mrs. Chamberlayne's age, for she was but nineteen years older than her son ; and looking at them together, it was hard to believe even that that difference existed between them, but she had been for some years confined by a hopeless spinal complaint to the two rooms on the ground floor, with the great bow window opening into the garden, into which she was carried on her sofa when the weather was warm and fine.

The old garden parlour at Brockhurst was one of those rooms possessing a mysterious richness and comfort—a charm which the upholsterer's art has little share in imparting. Every bit of furniture seemed to have worn as it were to its place. It was mellow and rich with the love and attendance of several generations. There was a patriarchal largeness and suggestiveness about it. One felt that grandfathers and grandmothers, young men and maidens and little children had all made merry together here ; and there was a cheeriness in the ticking of the ebony

timepiece, and a sort of jovial expectancy about the large easy-chairs, and in the grotesque faces in the great Chinese vases, whose light mosaic colours contrasted so well with the oak wainscoting and side-boards, that seemed to prophesy a return of those good old times.

The position of that brown leather arm-chair just out of the draught and of the way of careless feet, has been studied by more than one of the old Kentish patriarchs, whose names are written in the great square bible on the side-board. The hanging of the ancient little oval mirrors with candlesticks before them, have been seen to by eyes who knew well in what light their own was best reflected. For so many years so much had been added to it—so little taken away—hand after hand had been laid upon it with so much tenderness for those hands which had done their work there and been folded away in rest, that it could but grow rich and beautiful, gathering from time a peculiar tenderness of its own, as the little church of Nytimber had gathered the moss about its dull red roof.

Here, on a crimson sofa that was worn to a very comfortable dulness, Mrs. Chamberlayne

spent her days. She was a tall woman, with a full, fair face, blue-eyed, and of that transparent complexion which usually accompanies red hair—and Mrs. Chamberlayne's was red—not auburn or golden brown, but uncompromisingly red. She wore a dainty bit of white lace she called a cap over it, that gave much grace and softness to the rich bright waves that crowned a forehead broad and placid. She was a prisoner, probably for life, but her prison was one of the pleasantest spots of the earth, and she rested in it with much tranquillity and lively contentment. She was neither languid nor idle. The good books—old and new—and the fresh magazines and newspapers on her low table were well read; the pretty wool or silk embroidery had generally gained another flower or leaf for the vicar's wife to admire at each of her frequent visits. But the invalid's thoughts and fingers were most busy over her little writing-case. She was an indefatigable letter-writer. Her old school-girl friends had been retained in spite of her great seclusion, simply by the constancy of her correspondence. Romantic, girlish attachments had become deep, strong

friendships with many of those to whom her letters—staid, sweet, sensible—came as, perhaps, the only tokens of what life had once been, for they were still full of the warmth and heartiness of a girl's affection, while the deepening wisdom of a woman who studied attentively and humbly the experiences of others as well as those of her own, made them inexpressibly precious to many a heart wavering between wrong and right, or sinking in despair.

In the atmosphere of her garden, her flowers, her books, her calm and sunny household, she received and considered the stories of her friends' troubles and anxieties, thinking out for them counsel which might well be sweet, since she came by much of it as bees come by their honey, in communion with flowers, pure air, bright sunshine, and softened shade, for these were the chief pleasures of her life, and her untiring companions.

It was to this person that Elias Morgan, in the helplessness of his poverty and sorrow, brought his daughter, after discovering that an aged relative with whom he had thought to place her, had gone to that narrow home in which none can receive guests.

“Charlotte Chamberlayne,” he had said, standing by her sofa and looking down at her, “I little thought after your son Robert’s betrayal of me to ask anything of you or yours, but I am pressed sorely. There are other friends who would perhaps help me, but blood is thicker than water, I choose to come to you. My child is beset by the snares of the wicked. The doors of the poor are weak; will you guard her for me?”

The two travellers, their clothes covered with dust, and their faces pale and drawn, and almost haggard with intense mental suffering, seemed to have risen up like spectres before Mrs. Chamberlayne’s astonished eyes. Her first movement was to glide her trembling hand under her lace shawl and lay it on her heart, which, unused to sudden agitations, had begun to beat so violently as to alarm her. Her kinsman’s tale of sharp suffering, told more plainly by his voice than in his words, had come like a bitter wintry blast on the calm, sweet summer of her life. She held her hand against her side, and closing her eyes, struggled to regain

the calmness without which she was so unused to act.

Elias, who regarded Mrs. Chamberlayne in her luxurious surroundings as a kind of domestic Queen of Sheba, mistook the meaning of her rather prolonged silence and stillness, and after gazing upon her a few moments with great anguish and proud humiliation, he turned and drew Hirell towards the door, pausing before it to say,

“When my child, like Lazarus, shall lie upon the bosom of her father Abraham, if you, like Dives, shall call to her for help, then may she have power to serve you, Charlotte.”

Elias was punished for his haste. His name was gently called, and turning, he saw his afflicted kinswoman, who had been prostrate so many years, standing erect. There was a certain majesty in her form as she stood upright but helpless, reminding Elias of some newly descended angel, whose unaccustomed feet doubted the earth's vile contact. The mingled command and entreaty of the attitude was not to be resisted. Elias approached her in some fear for her, and indeed no sooner

had she seen her relatives returning, than she sank back on her sofa and fainted.

Her kind-hearted, quick-handed maids were soon about her, and had her completely restored ; and in half an hour Elias was sipping his tea with a sort of sad, stern peace at his heart concerning Hirell, whom Mrs. Chamberlayne had promised to cherish as a daughter so long as he should think fit to let her remain at Brockhurst.

If Robert Chamberlayne felt much surprise when he came in to his tea at the sight of his mother's visitors, he did not allow his surprise to embarrass himself or them very long ; but began to talk about his own affairs, his worry and disappointment about the new farm, and other home matters, with unusual volubility ; the whole drift of his discourse being to show his mother the urgent necessity for him to take up his quarters for a time at the hooded house. This unsympathetic and selfish conduct of Robert's instead of disgusting, seemed to please both his mother and Elias ; his other listener being too much prostrated by sadness and exhaustion to notice anything that was said or done. She

sat like a tired child whose mind was incapable of understanding the things that the others talked of.

Elias had left Brockhurst the next morning, and it was not till after his departure that Mrs. Chamberlayne began to feel some misgivings as to the charge she had undertaken.

When the door closed upon her father, Hirell, who was sitting on a chair near it, rose, stretched out her hand as if to reopen it, but refrained, and again sat down. Her gesture had been so impetuous, so passionate, Mrs. Chamberlayne thought to hear a childish exclamation of grief, or sudden burst of tears, but she was mistaken; Hirell was quite still and mute. It was then Mrs. Chamberlayne felt a keen regret at not being able to rise and go to her. Calling her to her side was such a different thing. She felt very kindly towards her, and was grieved to see how much a stranger Hirell evidently felt her to be.

Like some wild mountain bird, whose broken wing had let it fall into a rich garden, she looked with startled eyes, bewildered and stupefied, on the strange things about her. Her sad heart, more passionately loyal in its sad-

ness than ever to the old home, the old mountains, the old customs, turned against all that she saw. In her mind she was certainly grateful for the kindnesses shown her, but she regarded them as the listless eye of a dying bird regards the dainties which children hold to the wires of its cage to bribe it back to life and song. They had no power to comfort or to arouse her.

Day after day she went in obedience to Mrs. Chamberlayne's wish to walk about the garden, every yard of which, above and below, began to be a revelation of fresh beauty—such beauty as was not to be found in her wild mountain home—while the thick trees hid fuller choirs of birds than she had ever heard before, singing the prologue of the summer. She looked most often to the clouds, that best imitated her own hills. Mrs. Chamberlayne used to watch her looking up at them, and think how strange a fancy it was for such young eyes to seek so wistfully through blossoms and fresh green and sunshine for the clouds whose shadows dim their beauty.

When the minister's letter about Hugh reached her it increased her depression, and

seemed to make her more than ever sick of the world.

The soft, rich beauty of the budding Kentish summer was too exquisite not to be apparent to her—not to be a pain or a delight. It was a pain—it touched her to the quick—moving, yet sickening her spirit, like the passionate pleading of an unwelcome wooer.

Mrs. Chamberlayne watched and waited for improvement, but she watched and waited vainly. Perfectly tractable and gentle as her charge was in all her outward conduct, she felt her heart was yet as unapproachable and untamable in its pain as the wildest creature's in creation.

One morning she missed her. The poor bird was not as usual fluttering wearily about her sunny cage. She lay still in a corner of it, with dull, heavy eye, and dry, beating throat.

Mrs. Chamberlayne made her servants carry her on her light garden couch into Hirell's room, which was on the same floor as her own, and she found her in her bed too ill to move, moaning quietly, and murmuring piteously,

“Father” and “Kezia,” and other old home names.

After that Mrs. Chamberlayne’s doctor from Reculcester, whose handsome brougham used to stop twice a week regularly outside the ivied house, became a daily visitor at Brockhurst. Every evening, at dusk, Mr. Robert used to cross the lawn and sit in the American chair outside his mother’s window, and they would talk together in low voices.

At one time the smart, lively servant-maids went about the house on tiptoe with faces and voices very much subdued. Mrs. Chamberlayne became pale and worn-looking. Mr. Robert paid brief visits to her window many times in the day. Straw was laid down on the road side of the house to deaden the rumbling of the carts and waggons.

CHAPTER VII.

THE REFUGE DISCOVERED.

BUT the dark time passed over ; the patient's youth and fine constitution brought her safely through all the dangers by which she had been so fiercely beset. The straw was gathered away, the waggons rumbled by as heavily as before, the servants knocked with their brooms, and sang, and gossiped, and slammed doors. Mrs. Chamberlayne's faint colour returned to her cheek, her charge was still safe in her keeping.

One June morning this young kinswoman of Mrs. Chamberlayne's woke from a refreshing sleep, and looked with an affectionate and grateful gaze about her room. It was the look of a person whose life for many weeks had been as one dark night. She had a sweet and bright morning for her awakening. Its

light came through the striped dimity curtain that met across the open window, which admitted the scents of hay and lilac time.

"Thy servant liveth—thy sun is sweet," she said, and the tears stole softly and peacefully down the wasted cheeks.

The maid came in with her trim breakfast tray; the arrangement of which Mrs. Chamberlayne had superintended, looking at it before she let it go with her head on one side as lovingly as any would-be R.A. parting with his first picture.

A picture Hirell found it, with its old silver service, pretty pale pink china, delicate white loaf, so different from the coarse, almost black bread of Bod Elian, its pat of butter impressed with the prettiest of all the little wooden stamps kept for the purpose in the Brockhurst dairy, the freshly-gathered flowers on its snowy cloth, the magazine just come by post, the little pearl paper knife beside it—all these Hirell's soft, grateful eye took note of as the servant placed the tray upon her bed, and covered her shoulders, and told her she looked so much better, and "more nat'ral," and didn't she smell the hay? They were

making it in the Crosspath field, and were going to mow the Star meadow to-morrow, and cook's hands ached with drawing the ale, and she, Susan herself, must go and help, but would be back soon, to see how she got on with her breakfast.

Then Hirell—when she was gone—felt her heart beginning to stir a little, like something that had been numbed, and is quickening. The sick bird began to lift up its head and warm itself in the sunshine from which it had shrank before ; but even as it did so it again cowered, and shivered as if it had suddenly seen rising once more the head of the serpent that had wounded it.

Hirell drew back a little from the tray, pale and faint, and looking down on the flowers in fear and anguish.

To make the tray still more inviting to the invalid, Mrs. Chamberlayne had laid a letter that had come for her charge among the flowers she had gathered for her.

“What,” said Hirell to herself, “not over yet—not over yet! Oh, I cannot bear much! What can he be cruel enough to say to me now?”

She drew the letter from where it lay, under a long green leaf holding a lily of the valley, and tore it open with fingers that trembled so she could scarcely keep the paper still enough to see to read it.

And this was her letter :—

“ MY DEAR HIRELL,

“ It was but at eight o'clock last night while I was dining with some friends at my new town house in Eaton Square, that I heard for the first time of your place of abode and illness. I now write this from a village ale-house only a couple of miles from you ; where I mean to stay till I see you, and renew the conversation so abruptly broken at Werge Castle, by causes that originated at least in my over prudent anxiety for you as well as for myself.

“ Before daybreak I was beneath your window, which I soon discovered by signs that I thought could not mislead me ; and while I listened, I heard your window opened, saw your nurse look out, and report to you on the beauty of the morning—heard you answer her. How I refrained from then

speaking to you, from then demanding instant admittance to you, surely the recording angel will note to my credit, knowing I did it only as fearing to startle and injure you. You know not how I have sought you. Since our ill-omened parting at Bod Elian, I have had neither rest of body nor peace of mind. This is a third attempt in search of you here. I came before your arrival, and—I went away deceived. Then, I sent our friend, Mr. Jarman, and he went to the other farm. Now again I come, and find you, never again to lose sight of you. Be sure of that.

“Hirell, I cannot live without you. I have tried—yes, I *have* tried—and failed. Will you now punish me for this honest confession, or forgive me because of its honesty? Ah, yes. Love, true love, rich as life, and profound as death—this is your need and mine. We have gone too far to retreat: so, darling, *trust* me henceforward as you would trust your own soul. I see clearly, at last, my wants and my duty: both bring me here.

“Hirell, dearest, I cannot bear to say to you in this cold-blooded fashion things that ought to be said, and must be said, when we

are face to face. Then, when the whole world—that is to say, whatever of sweet savour the world contains—is concentrated, essenced in you, and I need only to look at you, listen to you, then, indeed, may I speak to you out of the fulness of my own yearning passionate belief and worship that which shall not be unworthy for you to hear.

“I have wronged you in many things that you know of, but there is one wrong of which you do not know—you are too unselfish to have discovered it, too deeply engrossed for others when you care for them to have found me out in this. Enough, I have found myself out, and now play the informer, not without secret hope of reward. I have defrauded you! Do not look startled—do not disbelieve. I have not taken of your worldly goods; no, but I have, in my delectable egotism, in my calm consciousness of superiority of sex, social position, age, experience, and what not, defrauded you of love’s sweetest, and most precious offerings, the outpourings of a worshipping heart. Can you help turning away in disgust if I tell you that I have discovered, since your absence has compelled

me to look more sharply into things, and, above all, into myself, that it is you who have played the lover, and I who have condescended to be so loved! Am I not judged now: judged, sentenced, and given over to swift execution?

“Laugh at me, that is my true punishment. I laugh at myself, but with a bitterness of scorn that heaven forefend you should ever feel toward the humblest thing that breathes, much less towards me. Laugh at me—if you can—but when you have done so, remember God loves mercy as well as justice. Above all, forget not I am now a suppliant at your feet. I descend from the throne, place my beautiful one there instead, and henceforth take my seat on the steps, and on the level of her footstool.

“Hirell, I begin to understand myself and you better, much better. Is it fortunate or unfortunate, that you in the process improve on acquaintance while I horribly deteriorate? But then do you not see that goodness like yours, so pure, sweet, exalted, boundless, could not possibly have been given by God for your own personal gratification alone?

And therefore, sinner that I am, unregenerate even in my regeneration, I cannot but conclude that the excess on your side is meant to balance the defect in mine ; and that the two have but to coalesce to become both perfect, for this life, which is earth, remember, not heaven.

“ In deep sincerity of heart, Hirell, I ask you to pardon—that which I can never again speak of while I live, never again think of without shame, and which I will not deny, even though I might with some show of truth do so. It would not be true truth—I own that ; you saw to the depth of my guilty soul ; and then I saw too ; and now bend before you humbly, and in a contrite spirit, as the prayer books say, to ask your full forgiveness.

“ To assure me of that I need only one little line from those dear gentle fingers, that even hard work could not spoil, and that I have so often kissed in wonder and reverence of soul—one little line only, saying to me—‘ Sinner, come.’

“ All else (and how much *that* includes you cannot, I am sure, conceive) I will then tell

you ; and if I do not satisfy you, I will ask no more, but go my way and demand of myself, if enough sense remains to me to answer the question—‘Can it be that thou hast won this priceless treasure and lost her?’

“But I will *not* lose her. No, thank God, she is not lost. She will get better, and there is a vain belief in my heart that I can help her, not only to get better still, but well, quite well, and with rapid steps, when she once more admits me to her society, the only society that John Cunliff, baronet as he is, M.P. as he is, and worldly to the heart’s core as he begins to fear he has long been, now finds he cares for.

“Hirell, only one little line to bid the truant ‘come!’

“If you are unfit to talk, let me only look on you, rest with you but a few minutes, and I will leave you in boundless content and gratitude.

“Ever yours, and yours only,

“JOHN CUNLIFF.”

This letter did Hirell some good as well as harm. It had re-opened her heart’s wound,

but it had poured balm into it. When Susan came to take away her breakfast she begged for a pencil and paper, and wrote her answer.

“DEAR SIR,—

“I pray you not to think too much about my illness. I am getting better. God has raised up for me in my need friends whom only he can thank. They have saved me not only from death, but from something much worse than death, my own heart’s despair and base ingratitude. I shudder as I look back upon the way I have come, but there is light near me and above me, and I am trusting that in time peace may come again.

“I am grieved that you have written to me, yet inexpressibly thankful for much you say in your good and kind letter. I wish I knew how to make you understand what I feel. I do so want—and now more than ever that you have given me so great a relief—that you shall think of me as kindly as I must think of you. Dear sir, all else is at an end between us—do believe that, for it is so!

“You ask my forgiveness. I do give it to you, I do indeed with all my heart, and soul,

and strength, and humbly as becomes one so much beneath you.

“I find I can write no more. Dear Mrs. Chamberlayne will be angry with me for sitting up so long to do this, for I write very slow and painfully, and I hope you will excuse any mistake, for there is a sort of mist comes over my eyes at times that frightens me.

“So now, dear sir, with many wishes and prayers for your happiness, in this world and in the next, I am—

“Your humble servant,

“HIRELL MORGAN.

“P.S.—I can *now* say, without one pang at my heart, that I believe you were right in thinking the position of your wife unfit for me. If at times thoughts of me make you impatient with yourself, think of that too—and that my last words to you were to ask you to do so.”

When her letter was finished and given to Susan to post, Hirell laid down and slept for some hours; and in the afternoon, though quiet and peaceful, was too ill to bear the blind up, or to see any of the haymaking in the Cross-path fields.

She passed a good night, and found no letter among her flowers to disturb her at her breakfast. She read a chapter in her little Bible without much pain to her eyes, for the first time for many days. She lay half sleeping, with a smile on her lips, and the book open in her feeble hands, when her nurse came in with a letter, which she said Clutterbuck's boy from the 'Hop Pole' had just brought, and to which answer was to be waited for. It bore the writing she expected, but sorrowed to see.

"Hirell, I will not receive this from you. Rather than destroy the paper on which your fingers have traced your thoughts, I would tear my own flesh off my body, but I *have* torn up that which you have now sent me. When shall I see you? Choose your own time. I can wait.

"JOHN CUNLIFF."

When Mrs. Chamberlayne was brought in to pay her usual morning visit, she found to her surprise Hirell sitting up, pale as her night dress, and with bright excited eyes, writing a letter.

"Hirell, this is very wrong—really it is wilful," she said.

"Please forgive me," answered Hirell, "but I am doing that which I must not leave undone. I will rest and do all you wish me, but do not hinder me—my head is strange, and I *must* finish."

"Don't distress yourself, my child. I will leave you, but exert yourself no more than you are positively obliged."

Left to herself, she wrote on—her old dangerous fever-red creeping back into her cheek, and making the tears scorch her, as now and then in the pauses of her thoughts they stole slowly down.

"SIR," she wrote, "Again and again in the darkness of my long black night, when a little space of sense came to me, I felt such bitterness of sorrow that I was glad to go back again even to that shelter—if only to forget."

"Always it was the same. The cry of my heart against you, sir, which I could not help but begin to pour out, till my own thoughts stifled me, and there was a blank once more."

"You will not, you say, heed the one last

dear wish of my soul, that we should part in peace. 'O God forgive you for the wrong you do, for the suffering you inflict !

"What I was when you found me, you know. Sad often, when I dreamed of that great world without, and compared it with my own narrow gloomy home, but happy in the love of my father, and all in my house ; and if I was too conscious how they exalted me, I never forgot that it was they, not myself, to whom my seeming elevation was due.

"There you found me. You were in great trouble, sir, and what woman's heart could help doing what mine did, trying to comfort you, even while I sought to keep such things unknown.

"There you saw me day by day, hour by hour—saw my father, and what I was to him—saw my ignorance, my every defect. You knew me—I dare to say it—as truly as it was in your nature to know me, had the years we passed together been more in number than the weeks of our real acquaintance.

"You loved me, you said. How I trusted you in return I need not speak of. But I would have given you more, a thousand-thou-

sand times more, had that been possible, than I did give. How often have I not prayed to God to enrich my heart, to enlighten my soul, to make me worthy of being given to one so full of all that stamps honour and nobleness on the name of man. I do not think any poor creature ever knelt in secret with more boundless swelling gratitude, or with more sense of the glory of life, and of the world than I did, for the wondrous chance of knowing and being loved by you. It was a secret I knew not how sufficiently to keep. I have cried often when unawares, words, looks, or accidents of any kind, made me think I had been unmaidenly in not concealing both the delight and pride I felt.

“And once loving you, from that time I could have borne any disappointment, however bitter, if only it did not come from you.

“You told me at Ewyn y Rhaiadr you had intended to leave me, and then made me confess my love. I thought of it afterwards, and while my heart was in its joyfulness and pride, found great pleasure in the remembrance. I thought of it on the evening of that dreadful day, and felt I could have been

reconciled by the remembrance to the worst, could have forgiven your thoughtlessness in committing me to such a hopeless future, had you simply told me in a fitting manner you could not marry me.

"I tremble and shiver when I think of myself on that day, and of what might have been had not a higher hand protected me—overwhelmed in darkness from which there seemed no escaping but by a cry to you, who watched and waited, seeking if there were but one spot in the poor soul through which evil powers might steal, with you to follow them in triumph.

"O sir! O sir! you have wrung this from me, as you might by a like inhuman violence squeeze the blood out of this weak body. I wanted to spare you this. I yearned to be permitted to think you would be sorry for all this when we had separated, and that then I, like so many more, might watch your good works, and desire all else to be forgotten. This, too, is only another dream. Well, I shall dream never, never more!

"I am ill—very ill. If you try me much more you will kill me.

“ I do forgive, in spite of all I have said—
only, let me rest. I entreat you, let me rest,
and may the peace that passeth all understanding
be yours is still the prayer of—

“ HIRELL MORGAN.”

CHAPTER VIII.

DARK DAYS.

HIRELL continued to recover slowly, but Mrs. Chamberlayne was not mistaken in saying that the excitement of her correspondence with Sir John Cunliff had taken all the spring from her recovery. She became well enough to join her aunt in the pleasant old parlour, to change the flowers in the Chinese vases for her, to go on with her lessons in Welsh stocking knitting ; but Mrs. Chamberlayne saw under the true eagerness to please, an apathy and a listlessness that the girl spent all her little strength in trying to conceal.

“Do you think you can *never* like Ny-timber, Hirell, dear ?” she asked once, as she saw her grand-niece standing in the window and looking as usual, not down along the

alleys of the garden, but up at the white clouds.

Hirell could not answer—her throat seemed to tighten. She still looked up at the sky as long as she could see for the upwelling tears, and that moment felt a loathing for the bright blooming country about her, that smothered the gentle and grateful reply she would fain have given. She thought of her own home as of something cold and soulless, out of which all the life and joy had passed for ever; but it was as a mother thinks of her dead child—feeling it to be far dearer in its coldness and soullessness than any strange one, however beautiful.

The lovely yellow laburnums were all in their glory, shining here and there among the old trees of the garden like sunshine, that both bloomed and burned. And Hirell was conscious of them as a bereaved mother is of the tossing golden locks of some strange fair child. She withdrew her eyes, and answered her aunt with an inward shiver:

“It is very pretty.”

Mrs. Chamberlayne did not try to draw from her a more direct answer to her question,

but in her own mind began to fear the understanding and healing of this strange suffering heart was beyond her skill.

She was better—yes—she could move about only feeling a little tired ; but she began to think she should never have her old health and lightheartedness again, she should never *care* for life any more. Living would be like climbing a toilsome hill to look upon a prospect that she had seen, by some magician's aid, to be barren and dreary ; it would be like watching the unfolding of a rose at whose heart she knew a canker to be lying. It was in vain she told herself that health and happiness would come again ; the most alarming thing to her was the certainty, the sharp reality of her heart's suffering and despair. When Mrs. Chamberlayne prepared little surprises for her, which she often did,—a new dress, or bonnet, or something that she thought would please her—Hirell would thank her with expressions of pleasure and gratitude which she thought must be sincere, till a choking feeling at her throat, and a hot mist at her eyes made her say to herself, " Miserable hypocrite, you know you have no

more gratitude than a stone for these things."

When she prayed, a half-smiling, half-cynical face came between her and the glory and power she had once been used to feel through her inmost soul, when she knelt at Bod Elian, in the chapel of her people. It seemed to waylay her most passionate sentences of prayer, and smile over and reason with her about them—half in mirth and half in earnestness and wisdom. She knew it was the recollection of things Cunliff had said at different times, in the same bantering manner in which this haunting voice spoke to her.

Her own fate was a great mystery to her. Why should it have come upon her?—this peculiar trouble. Why should her peace have been broken in upon, and her faith in life, and the world, and heaven itself, been so cruelly shaken. She asked things of her own heart and in her prayers piteously, but not impatiently, though day after day dragged on and left her unenlightened—and her weariness and hopelessness increased.

Late one evening, Mrs. Chamberlayne was carried to her room, and in her gentle way

gave her unwelcome news. She brought her another letter. She did not wish to give it she told Hirell, knowing how much she had been disturbed by others from the same writer ; but Robert had given his word to Sir John Cunliff, who had appealed to him, that it should be placed in Hirell's hands that night.

When her aunt had left her, Hirell held her hands clasped in her lap, a moment looking at the letter as it lay on the table before her, with something of her father's sternness in her eyes.

It remained there when she opened it, and while she read it through.

"Hirell, your letter is horrible—but I do not wonder at it. As soon as I can forget the smart, I shall only see in it new evidence of what you are. That I already know.

"This is sent to say that if ever man was ashamed, I am.

"What can you need more ?

"I must, in spite of all, keep some self-respect, or be worthless alike to myself and others. Do not ask further abasement.

"This is a black spot in my life, which I will wash out.

"I have again read your painful letter—inexpressibly painful! I have brought myself to receive it, as I am sure it was in your own secret, tender, and loving soul meant to be received, as the inevitable overflow of a wronged love towards its wronger. I lay it to my heart. I will read it again and again, till I have drawn out of it, if possible, every bit of virtue it contains for the healing of dis-tempered minds. Hirell, I have wept over it, for the first time since manhood.

"Are you now content? It is idle to talk of my going away. I shall never go away without you!

"But you are ill. O my sweet darling, if I might but be by you, to nurse you, to amuse you, to lighten your load of depression!

"You want mirth, not medicine—hope, not anodynes—the one who loves you, and whom you love—have you not said so?—and not troops of bewailing friends.

"But you think to teach me patience, per-

haps. So be it. Hirell, there is nothing I will not learn, if only you say it will please you, and make you grow strong.

“Shall I tell you what I have been dreaming about of late? Yes. Because I want to know what you think of the dream.

“Hirell, I often wonder whether you are like the clerk of Oxenford, of whom our first great national poet, Chaucer, speaks, when he says—

“‘And gladly would he learn, and gladly teach.’

“Hirell, tell me frankly, would you gladly learn?

“Do you wonder why I ask? Listen. I am going to propose something that I see beforehand will be very dangerous to me, and perhaps very foolish into the bargain.

“What subject ever asks his despotic queen to put on attributes that shall give her greater power than before over him? Yet that is what I am about to do, either because I can't help myself, or because I have such unbounded faith in my own particular despot.

“What if you were a queen—suddenly transformed as regards blood, descent, and

position—but in all other respects just such as you are ; a queen who *must* reign, say at the risk of war and bloodshed, and social convulsion—what would be your first desire, the immediate and overpowering cry of your soul ?

“ Would it not be, ‘ O God, make me fit ! make me fit ? ’

“ And what, Hirell, would you make fit ? Is the vista of difficulty so appalling in detail, so interminable in apparent length, that you cannot readily grasp the whole, and say to yourself, ‘ Can I, or can I not do this thing ? ’

“ You might say ‘ No ’ at once, in your sweet modesty, humility, and inexperience—when these are placed side by side with an idea apparently so formidable as this, of turning a poor simple maiden, fresh from tending her sheep on the Welsh mountains, into a woman capable of queening it in the eyes of a critical world.

“ But can you say ‘ no ’ to the actual truth, as I shall now put it before you ? I think not.

“ Hirell, you need one, two, perhaps three years (for I will rather exaggerate than

diminish the sacrifice I am about to ask from you) of that particular kind of education that shall best supplement the education given you by your father (a truly admirable one, for how else could you be that which you are ?) ; of an education that shall qualify you to converse in any circle on the topics that are always current there, and in the tone peculiar to the best-bred women. Hirell, my ear even now seems to listen entranced to the music of *your* voice, than which nothing can be more full of fascination, sweet and pure, trained as it might be, and to your own enjoyment. I care little for mere accomplishments, but I do not think you would find the French language any difficulty. Do you remember the lesson I once gave you, and in which you really delighted me by your progress, only it was impossible to get you further, for your mocking laughter and unseasonable merriment ?

“As to music, you ought to sing and play to perfection. Hugh has impregnated your whole being with the love of sweet sounds ; and music is to me, when good, a supreme enjoyment. Still I should wish no more than this—that you bent your mind steadily

to it for a sufficient time, then if you were not satisfied, I would cheerfully say, 'Let it go.'

"How do you like the first half of my sermon? Is it very hard to accept? You laugh! Well you may! They are indeed trifles.

"But there is another limb to the homily. I am a rich man, a man of rank, a politician, likely to be a minister some day if my ambition, and my industry hold. What *ought* these things to involve for my wife? More, much more, I take leave to say, than the wives of men like myself generally give to their husbands. I shall mention in few words one point as suggestive of all the rest. I should not like my wife to become a furious fanatic in politics, but I should like her to take a real living interest in the subject, if only for my sake.

"Can you, Hirell, *for my sake*, do such things? They demand work, perseverance, devotion, but success is assured, and the reward great. The very best masters England can give would be at your service.

"Dare I even dream that I deserve to have such a wife as mine would be, if to her pre-

sent self these externals and improvements were added.

"I will not answer that. I only know how I need her.

"Once more I plead for the line, the one little line, 'Sinner, come to me!'

"I will come. I will, indeed, whether you say it or no, but not yet, nor without your permission, if I can get it, or see hope of getting it within any endurable time.

"Believe me I suffer in your suffering, and dare not do aught rashly to endanger or retard even for an hour your recovery, for which I will this night try to pray to God, where, I am ashamed to say I have not knelt, even in thought, for many many years, in the solitude of my chamber. Yes, I will try to pray to Him to make your restoration as swift and entire as your best friend could wish, among whom henceforward I claim the first place.

"Did I say claim? Strike out the word for me. I can only plead—but I do it with a passionate something gnawing at my heart, which you alone can remove.

"I will read nothing more—I swear it, —from you till I see the words—

“ ‘Sinner come, for pardon and peace, first ; then for ——’

“I will not conclude my sentence, in the hope you will do it for me.

“Ever yours sincerely,

“JOHN R. CUNLIFF.

“P.S. You have been in haste to answer my previous letters, and in your haste have been most cruel. In answering this—a repentant and true heart’s last appeal to you—take time, and I will wait, trusting to God your leisure may be more merciful than your haste.

“J. R. C.”

The letter read and laid down Hirell leant back in her soft little chintz-covered chair, and turning her face against it, shed some bitter tears over its bright roses.

But in a little while her father’s strong, stern spirit seemed again to enter her heart, and rouse and strengthen it, and she got up to fetch her writing things, and began her answer immediately.

“SIR,

“I reply to your letter at once. I have so few words to say that I find it quite unnecessary to take time to choose them as you suggest. Sir John Cunliff, believe me, as one to whom you know truth is dear, there is nothing now that you can write or speak that would make me change my determination never to become your wife. I entreat you, therefore, not to pain me by so humiliating that which I in my own mind had set up higher than all things but God. For you do humiliate yourself by using your powers in pleadings to one who can never more have faith in you. Though I cannot read your words of repentance without tears, I do not believe in them. O sir, you are not repentant of more than having lost what you wished for by setting too low a price on it. No, it is the simple truth that I do not believe in your repentance or your sorrow. Indeed, sir, in your kindly expressed intentions with regard to my better instruction, and in your generous compliments to myself, I could fancy you almost gay, or at least in a state of mind little in keeping with the broken spirit you profess to

plead with, and so movingly as to cause me many tears, notwithstanding my doubt of it.

“If you persist in taking advantage of the kindness of my aunt and Robert, I must trouble my father in the matter, which I shall be loth to do, as he has enough to bear.

“Your humble servant,

“HIRELL MORGAN.”

CHAPTER IX.

EVENING VOICES.

THE next afternoon another letter was brought to Hirell, as she sat in the garden by Mrs. Chamberlayne's couch.

"This is the last I shall read from him, aunt," she said, as she opened it. "If he sends any more I shall send them to father to answer."

"MY DEAREST HIRELL," wrote Cunliff, "still dearest, in spite of all your harsh words, so you do not believe in my repentance and sorrow—well, you shall at least believe in my patience and my love. I bear all that you say to me in a spirit as meek as even you could desire a sinner to take his punishment—a sufferer to kiss the rod. I have been most unwise, most cruel, in troubling you just now,

while you are so ill and so overwhelmed by anxiety about your family. I have written to my friend Kezia, for information as to poor Hugh's health, and am so truly rejoiced to hear he is recovering. In his next start in the world I trust to be allowed to be of some assistance to him. And now I must tell you a most annoying thing has happened, which compels me to go instantly to London. A great debate is coming on in the House of Commons ; the result may influence the fate of the ministry ; every vote is important ; and, in a word, honour and every consideration of duty and character demand my presence. I am obliged to own I must go.

"Can you not in this feel for me ?

"I write hurriedly, for I have already delayed too long.

"Hirell, dearest, I will make a compact with you. One I little thought of a few hours ago. I will promise you on my sacred honour to leave you alone henceforward, not only till Parliament is over, but for some little time beyond, only entreating you to take no step in the meantime that will make our union impossible.

"I won't deny I have my own objects to serve in this. I want to be free when I do again place myself at your feet; so I will stay patiently in London—that to me hideous wen—till Parliament adjourns, then despatch arrears of indispensable private business, and be with you immediately after.

"How I shall exist till then I know not. Still I exact no new promise, no fresh bonds, but offer you liberty for so long a period, trusting that your sense of justice (even if there be no more tender a thing pleading for me in your heart) may keep you from doing anything to make my voluntary absence a cruel mockery. By the time this reaches you I shall have left Kent.

"Yours ever truly,

"JOHN R. CUNLIFF."

All day Hirell could not think of the letter without a certain vague alarm at the idea of seeming to give Cunliff permission to hope, by being silent. But she saw no good in writing; and, on the whole, felt it better to let her last words stand as a final answer. Then, too, his absence was an expressible relief to her.

She seemed able to breathe more freely—to hear sounds about the house without starting and trembling—her slim form when she sat down looked more restful—her very voice had more peace and sweetness in it.

When Hirell went to bed it was still daylight, and she stood a minute or two at her window, listening to the gradually subsiding hum of the village—that pleasantest sound of all the long summer's day—when mothers are calling home their children from their daisy-gathering in the road-side meadows, and neighbours gossip across fragrant garden hedges, and bird-boys and plough-boys just home from work—are shouting over their mysterious games, with mouthsfull of bread and butter—and the blacksmith is putting out his fire, and pot-house politicians are waxing warm in the little corner garden, where pewter mugs are turned down upon the dahlia sticks. They are doubtless politicians of most narrow, illogical ; and coarsely expressed opinions ; the blacksmith very likely breaks some promise concerning the shoeing of somebody's horse, in putting out

his fire so early ; the boys at play probably cheat in the laws of their games ; the neighbours gossiping over the sweet-peas are perhaps virulent scandal-mongers ; the mothers calling home their children may be harsh-voiced and ungentle, bringing the little ones in trembling haste from out the long-flowered grass which has been to them as a wonderful fairy forest where they could fight their way easily with their soft little hands, and lose and find each other at will. And how strange that out of such discords should flow a sound so sweet and full of mysterious happiness, so redolent of home and comfort and the poetry of labour and of rest as that which floats softly to Hirell's window, with the odours of the little Nytimber gardens. It is as if the earth in the beauty of its fading summer day and coming summer night has been attuned to yield nothing but music, even to the bitter and complaining breath of humanity.

Hirell stood and listened to this homely and pleasant murmur which, in the full, large voice of nature, rich with the chirpings of callow blackbirds in the elms, and the jovial whirring of gnats and tinkling of sheep bells,

was small and dreamy like an infant's crying overpowered by its mother's lullaby. As Hirell listened it sounded to her as the happy murmur of a world from which her sorrow parted her. She felt very lonely, and almost sadder than when her trouble had been new. Then her spirit had been content to lie crushed, but now that it tried to rise it felt bitterly how much it had been wounded and enfeebled.

The stars that were golden in the waning daylight grew brilliant and silvery as the evening deepened ; the nightingale began to sing in the screen of trees dividing the two long fields dotted with little hillocks of hay. The village hum came to her softly and sweetly, and moved her heart with a great tenderness for the world of which it seemed to speak so pleasantly. Her thoughts, as she looked up at the stars, fell into a silent entreaty for comfort, and a reconciliation of her soul with life, and life's duties and pleasures. From that sorrow in which she felt she had been placed as in an ark of safety when sinking in dangerous waters, she sent a prayer, as Noah sent the dove, entreating

God that if one green leaf of hope were left
for her on the waste of her grief-invaded life,
He would let some messenger bring it to her
for her sad heart's comfort.

CHAPTER X.

AT THE HOODED HOUSE.

SIR JOHN CUNLIFF had left Kent very well pleased with Robert Chamberlayne.

On the morning of the same day on which Hirell had received his farewell letter he had called on Robert at the Hooded House. It was the first time he had done this, though he had twice waylaid the young farmer in his fields, and found him tolerably genial and willing to assist him in getting his letters conveyed to Hirell.

It is true he might not have found him so kind a friend in this respect, had he not managed, and without saying anything positively untrue, to make Robert believe it was solely on her father's account that she was now refusing him ; after, as Sir John assured

him, there had been a solemn engagement between them.

Robert certainly thought the baronet hardly treated, and said as much.

"It's their religion," he muttered, "it's always making them do some unheard-of thing."

Robert had sat in the little Nytimber church till its doctrines had become bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh. He was not bigoted—he believed in some men being able to see further than he saw in such matters—even further than the portly old Vicar of Nytimber himself could see—but in his own heart Robert had a calm deep-rooted content in the old state of things, that had agreed so well with the Chamberlaynes and their land time out of mind. He had a great respect for Elias and his stern, high principles—and for the sweet, fearless transparency of Hirell's nature—but do as he would, Robert could not help seeing in their constant trouble and the poverty of their land, a sort of judgment on them for departing from the more orthodox and comfortable state of things.

When Sir John called upon him Robert

was sitting down to a one o'clock dinner in the unfurnished dining-room of the Hooded House ; and it did not take his visitor many minutes to discover that Robert's self-banishment from Brockhurst was attended by not a few inconveniences, and sacrifices of domestic comfort.

The easy chair and one or two favourite pictures—the pretty little davenport with its stand of books—the bouquet of roses, and other luxuries and ornamentations sent over by Mrs. Chamberlayne, looked almost absurd in the great unfurnished room, the ceiling of which was not entirely free from cobwebs.

Sir John's quick eye also noted that the simple dinner was ill-cooked and ill-served ; and that Robert seemed afraid of uttering his remonstrances loud enough for Mrs. Payne, who was very deaf, to hear. He evidently had as great a horror of rousing her temper, as of rousing a kennelled mastiff ; and indeed his visitor saw it was not without some reason, for when Robert asked for another plate and glass for Sir John, she informed him flatly, that she had not agreed to cook for all the parish, or all the strangers that

liked to come after him, "ringing the bells as if a body had no ears."

When Sir John had praised the views from the hooded windows, and had had the politeness to discover that he was fond of home-made bread and cheese, the only thing on the table that Robert ventured to recommend him, Hirell was spoken of, and Sir John's intentions concerning her made known to Robert.

Robert thought the plan of leaving Hirell alone till she should be sufficiently strong to hear Sir John plead his own cause personally, a good one, and said so.

Then Cunliff thanked him for having befriended him thus far, and asked him bluntly, if he might go in the hope that he would still continue to further his cause as much as lay in his power, both with Hirell and her family.

When the question was put to him, Robert was standing by the window, and for a moment or two afterwards he remained silent, looking out on scenes that were too familiar to him not to speak now as eloquent witnesses of his own past hopes.

But thinking of those hopes now did not injure Sir John's cause; for the strongest among them had been the hope of making Hirell's sad life happier. And from all that Robert had learnt of her state, from the words she had uttered during her illness, from his knowledge of the fascination she would find in a man of Cunliff's tastes and accomplishments, from all these Robert had gathered the firm belief, that Hirell Morgan's happiness now depended on her marriage with the man who was asking him to stand his friend.

Cunliff studied Robert's face that moment or two furtively and shrewdly, and the study gave him additional respect for the friend he wanted to take up his cause. He saw a man who was not ashamed or too much afraid of his own weakness, to think over unflinchingly before another man the tenderest secrets of his heart. Sir John would not have cared for Hirell to have seen Robert as he stood there weighing the worth of his love for her, to have seen his face just a little stung perhaps by Sir John's request, but otherwise full of tenderness, bold, honest, strong,

unabashed, unveiled by any show of indifference.

"Well," he said suddenly, "I want to see her happy, if there's any possibility of persuading her people to let her be so. I suppose you know—you have heard from her how I have failed as regards myself?"

"Hirell has told me all," answered Cunliff, "and of your admirable consideration."

"Well," interrupted Robert bluntly, "if you know that I failed on my own account, don't expect me to do very brilliant things on yours—that's all I wanted to say. What I can do with Hirell and her father in the matter I will do."

And he held out his hand, which Sir John grasped gratefully, though he *did* observe that the rest of Robert's form held rather proudly and rebelliously aloof, reminding Sir John of Ephraim Jones's favourite saying, "The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."

They walked up the village together and parted at the cross roads.

Sir John on the whole was well pleased with the advocate he had left behind him. He knew that while Hirell had never been in

the least degree in love with him, she yet had what Sir John thought an absurdly high opinion of his judgment and general character. He had certainly a little modified his own estimate of Robert since he had been in Kent, and had so many opportunities for observing how greatly he was respected.

It was not long before he discovered that Robert had the good fortune to be wonderfully popular without making any kind of sacrifice to obtain his popularity. His independence in his dealings with men above himself in social position was shown in so simple, natural, and quiet a manner, as not to offend, though it might occasionally surprise, the squires, magistrates, and other rural magnates with whom he came in contact. It was not easy to frown down a man who paid his labourers higher wages than anyone in the county ; and whose love of justice and of honesty in its purest and most primitive sense, was a bye-word of the neighbourhood.

In spite of his being constantly seen in his own fields and farmyards hard at work, he was admitted into good society at Reculcester,

though not into the "Bishop's set." He had a fine voice, and sang well, and gave faded gaslight pleasures a dash of freshness and hearty reality.

And it was no mere jealousy made Cunliff decide that Robert Chamberlayne was very handsome.

Those Kentish autumns that had ripened twenty-six harvests in his life had put their spells about him, as they had put them about his corn-fields and his orchards—the spells of their burning noontides and their still, breathless nights, and had given his form a supple strength and grace, and his face a perpetual sunshine.

The young ladies of that limited circle of Reculcester society into which Robert was allowed, declared him to be far more handsome than striking. His face wanted expression; its unchanging good-humour was very pleasant and refreshing to see—very loveable—but also very tantalizing, when the sad, soul-smitten glance was being watched for. In fact, Robert had the behaviour of a man who already loved, and was contented and happy in his love.

CHAPTER XI.

CARRYING THE HAY IN THE STAR MEADOW.

THE next morning—though by that time she had lost her yearning towards life—a messenger of hope did come to Hirell.

It was about eight o'clock, an hour before Mrs. Chamberlayne's breakfast-time, that, having dressed herself, Hirell sat down near her window, and began some needlework; stitching rapidly, as if she could keep off dangerous thoughts with the point of her needle; and to show the tears that always came pressing at this hour when body and soul felt weakest, that there was no time for their falling.

The curtains of her window were open only just wide enough for her to see a green tree, whose leaves had come later than those of its neighbours, and were fresher and paler. The sun was shining on them, and they were very

bright—quite luminous, as with a light of their own.

Suddenly she heard a rush of swift small wings, and looking up saw that a little brown bird had perched at the end of a twig of the bright tree, and was swinging vehemently to and fro.

Something about the bird made Hirell lay down her work and look at it. It was a sparrow, very sleek and small, his little bead-like eye glittering in the sun. Surfeited with the summer's sweets, his breast throbbing as though it would burst, he had come there wild for solitude, to embower and hide himself from all his mates, and to swing and to rock himself alone, balancing his happy little heart. He turned his head from side to side, and chirruped sharply. And still he rocked and swung, and his shadow was on one of the leaves as they waved about him, bright as with the light of that mysterious world from which they had so lately come. Sometimes he would lift his tiny wings, spreading them out to the breeze and stroking them with his beak, as if even his little feathers were cloyed with happiness.

After he had been there awhile he flew away refreshed by his brief solitude, and Hirell felt as if the tiny shadow that had left the leaf stayed and quivered over her heart still.

The overflow of the little creature's joy went to her grief, and swelled it till its bitter waters found passage from her eyes.

Where was this sweetness and this joy with which her small guest was so sated and overburdened? Was there such wealth at a little sparrow's service, and none for a starving human heart?

She draws back her curtain, and looks out with a yearning and hungry look for the first time since she has been in Kent, *desiring* to see. She does see: and soon her eyes begin to lose their haggard hopelessness, and to grow soft and absorbed. She leans her head on her hand, and a tenderness comes over her face, and a peace that is almost gladness.

The road that lies between Hirell and the two long meadows is unusually silent and deserted; for the hay-fields form the centre of attraction. Under the long hedge on the stubble are seated in a row such little girls from the village as are spared the discipline

of the Nytimber school on account of the babies, whose calico sunbonnets, which reveal nothing of their owners but a rattle or a buttercup-grasping fist, dot the field in considerable numbers, like some strange fungi peculiar to haytime. That half of the Star meadow which lies nearest the road, is cleared of the fragrant heaps that in orderly profusion still lie on the furthest half, right to where the hedge divides it from a cornfield of lustrous young green ; and beyond the cornfield wave the grasses of another meadow in all their glory of sorrel, and flower, and seed. Here the mowers are at work, driving the sharp line of tall, blooming grass further and further away.

This field shelves suddenly down, so that Hirell sees the waggon, which is in the middle of the meadow, nearest her, standing against the sky with its rich yellow load ; on the top of which a man, with careless hardihood, is standing, holding a hayfork, receiving and packing down the fresh contributions to the russet load that the others are tossing up to him. On the right is a hill, covered with a little forest of hopsticks, whose bare tops

look strange enough ; for the tightly-clinging fresh young plants afford them as yet but a scant covering. On the left of the hayfields is the avenue and the hooded house, the grounds of which are separated from the black, furrowed field where the plough is at work, by a great cluster of oaks ; whose leaves are now in their freshest gold-green beauty, and still retain that crisp crimp of the folds in which they have lain in the bud. A delicious gurgling of young throats and old comes from this copse ; and now and then an army of chattering specks, disorganised and uncertain, will arise from its midst, advance and hover over the cornfield, then, at the report of an unseen gun, wheel round and retreat in the blue distance, spreading and condensing, and again spreading and condensing, with a strange sort of disorderly method.

Early as it is indoors, the day appears to have attained its noon heat and mellowness. A sky of deep, burning blue spreads like a thing that can never change, over the full country ; the sun, a clear ball, pale with intensity, is high, smiting even lusty strength with languor ; the heavily-maned team-horses smoke

as their great limbs strain over the furrows, while the ploughman takes mechanically his toilsome, plunging steps beside them, and the haymakers twirl their forks with a slow, monotonous movement, a subdued strength that looks like sleepy indolence.

While every dog-rose on the hedges, and every bell of the little bindweed under the hedges, had its deepest secrets of tint and perfume, and golden floss laid bare to the burning sun, the flowers on the shady side of the garden, of which a small slip is visible from Hirell's window, still remain in their dewy stillness, like sleeping princesses in a guarded palace. The heavy, wet lilac plumes are drooping and still among their leaves; the laburnum's gold tresses lie in tangled, dewy luxuriance on the wall-top; over which a great bee, tired of the field beauties, comes humming noisily into the quiet garden.

The waggon, with its russet load standing out against the sky, and making by its hugeness, horses and men look small, is quite the centre-piece of the picture—set in a grand half-oval—by the hop-pole covered hill on the right side, and the avenue trees and thatched

gables of the hooded house on the left. Towards it stare the cows, as they lift their drowsy, dripping faces from the open pond near the road ; and the mowers, in the furthest field beyond the corn, always look that way when they pause, to rest, and spit upon their palms.

Hirell's gaze also constantly returns to it, for it is the figure standing on the piled-up load that imparts to these scenes the familiarity and homeliness they have suddenly assumed for her. She owes to him the vague sweet memories of them—memories that have been lost, but that come again and take away the strangeness the place has worn till now. The sight of him reminds her that what she sees should not be strange, but as the reading, in its original language, of a poem, of which she has once heard with delight a feeble translation :—as the listening to a melody, of which the key-note was struck long years ago.

On the broken wall, at the back of Bod Elian, she has often sat with Robert, talking of these scenes, and he has kicked the fallen stones into rough models of the house, the church, the stocks, the pound, and the fields,

with their dividing hedges and rustic fences and gates, striving hard to prove to her that if her father could ever be prevailed upon to let her spend a week with his mother, at Brockhurst, when Robert himself was at home for the holidays, that week would fall little short in its effects of seven days spent in Paradise. Hirell, in the time of her childish doubts of, and secret rebellion against, the austere religion and life of her small prison-like world, had begun to long for a taste of the rich plenty and sunny freedom of Robert's home, the reality of which his mother's letters seemed to prove more than all his own eloquence.

But all such wishes vanished when Hirell found herself beginning to be regarded as one of the shining lights of her people—when she saw eyes, usually cold and condemnatory, or stern and preoccupied, rest upon her with wonder and reverential tenderness, she began joyfully and tremulously to believe in her own saintliness, and to put from her mind all earthly, or, as her ministers would have said, “carnal” subjects, and Robert and Kent were in the list. She declined his offer of a small

hamper of Nytimber Nonsuch apples, and burnt the copies he had sent her for the improvement of her hand-writing, as they were all on the same topic,—“Kent, the garden of England,” or “Nytimber, a Village in Kent,” traced in Robert’s bold hand, in characters large enough to fill up the line. The birthday gloves she had not the heart to refuse, but requested they might always be black, a request which Robert contemptuously disregarded.

And now the picture which had been the richest thing in her childhood’s imagination, lay before her, glowing warmly, breathing sweetly.

She remembered how one day Robert, in a fit of sharp home-sickness, when Mr. Lloyd had been cross, and Mrs. Lloyd severe on the subject of spilt ink, sat with her on the same spot on the broken wall, and heard from her that she likewise had endured indescribable persecutions from the village schoolmistress, on account of her stupidity at learning to turn the heel of her first knitted stocking—and they sat together, she crying, and he plunged in a gloomy reverie, with his hands in his pockets, and his foot on his Latin grammar.

Almost as vividly as she sees the real Robert on the hay-waggon, she sees the slim young student who sat beside her on the fallen wall, rather thin and pale, and dark under the eyes with rapid growth, and unaccustomed "worry" of his studies. She remembers how those blue, darkly-circled eyes turned on her suddenly, wistfully, and how Robert, putting off all that assumption of manliness by which most boys so disguise themselves, said simply, as he drew away the half-knitted stocking with one hand, and laid the other on her shoulder—

"Oh, Hirie, don't you wish we could put this horrid stocking in my Euclid, and pitch 'em over Criba Ban, and tramp off to Kent, and have no more horrid worry all our lives? *Don't* you, Hirie, darling?"

She remembers how she fell into the fascination of his idea and answered, that she should like it very much, and that of course they must expect the journey to be like the Pilgrim's Progress, full of fearful dangers, so that Robert might display a valour unheard of in these days, and both a devotion and faith that should carry them safely past lions

and demons and Giant Despair, and the Valleys of Death, and all sorts of things invented by Satan to shake their faith in each other—and at last reach the enchanted fields of Nytimber, where they were to rest as in a prefatory Heaven of unlimited duration.

So the charm of sweet, old acquaintance steals over all the summer scenes before her, giving a deeper sunshine to the gold of the buttercups and laburnums, a fresher sweetness to the scent of the lilacs and the hay. So her trouble has brought her to this: the shipwreck of all the richer, dearer hope of her womanhood, has still left her in the enjoyment of her childish dream.

Could she be as she was then, and forget all that had happened since? Here are the fields she has longed for—more beautiful and rich than even Robert had taught her to imagine them. And then the gentle, wise, and generous ruling spirit of the whole—the good Samaritan, under whose hands her wounds are healing—at the thought of her, tears rise hot and fast, and hide the pleasant fields and dazzling sky.

Strange that the very one who made her

love this place and long for it should be the means of destroying its charm whenever she thought of him, and of bringing back the fierce throbbing life into her half-conquered sorrow. She can think of the slim lad with his half troubled, half laughing eyes, and good tempered despair as to his own educational progress,—she can think of him always with affectionate pleasure. But when she turns to him who now stands on the waggon of hay, laughingly inviting his men to throw up more and more to the rich burthen, the full-faced, blue-eyed, supple-framed, young farmer—how can she look at him and not see the form that stood by him near the bridge at Dolgarrog, one Sunday ; or the blank disappointment that he brought into her happy, prosperous home the morning after that Sunday, or the way in which he assisted them in their poverty—the lodger that he brought ?

Wonderfully unconscious of his crimes poor Robert looks, as he shouts to Mrs. Chamberlayne's overseer, who has objected to his taking the management of the Star meadow hay, on the plea that he would not be up early enough to set the men to work, and who

now comes to find three hours' work done, and to see the men trying to conceal a grin as Robert greets him in a laughing voice, round and mellow, and far sounding,—

“So you’ve come in time for the beer, Wrigley?”

Mr. Wrigley, after scornfully surveying the amount of work done, as if remarking, mentally, it was not done in the style *he* would have had it, turns his wrath upon the babies; and the sun-bonnets go crawling off in hasty and confused retreat, only to advance again as soon as his back is turned, and take up their former ground as securely as ever.

Meanwhile Robert descends from his exalted position, and stands leaning against his favourite black Bess, his straw hat pushed back in a most ungentlemanly fashion, and his face looking stupid enough in that blinding sun.

By this time the great can of beer has arrived at the scene of action, under the care of the Brockhurst groom, in morning undress, and smart, pretty Susan, who guards her face from the sun, and admiring and grateful eyes, with a branch of lilac she has snatched off in coming through the garden.

Mr. Wrigley gives out the beer, offering the first draught to Robert, who perhaps would scarcely show so lively an appreciation of its refreshing and invigorating powers, did he know that the brightest eyes of all the Welsh teetotallers were watching him.

As Mr. Wrigley's task of giving out the beer draws to a close in the Star meadow, it may be seen that the men turn and glance across the green corn, to that distant field where the mowers are at work, with a look at once congratulatory and envious, as they think that the pleasure which for themselves is over, has yet to be enjoyed by their companions with the scythes.

Robert goes to the stile, and gives a peculiar cry in a high-pitched, ringing voice. One of the stooping figures looks half round over its shoulder—the young master holds up the can, and raps it musically with the pewter mug. Up go the gleaming scythes, moving agitatedly in the sunshine an instant, then down again, and then a row of stooping figures come moving with a sort of lively slowness along by the green corn.

They are all oldish men, some of them so

old that one cannot help thinking each moves his scythe with that slow, measured sweep in the fear that if he gives it too wide a swing in his backward stroke it may clash against another scythe of another silent reaper very close behind him. They have more respect for Robert than the younger labourers, and give him the complimentary title of "squire," because his grandfather was known to them as the Squire of Nytimber when they first came to the farm ; and there is much wiping of brows and twitching of rolled-up shirt-sleeves, as they approach the stile where he sits.

There is also some old-fashioned, flattering toast muttered by the owner of the tanned arm that first receives the frothing mug, as one may see by the brusque good-humoured nod and wave of the hand that Robert gives, as if he would accept so much graciously, but decline more.

The mug has passed through all the tanned hands now, and the mowers go back again along by the young corn.

The poetry of the morning for them is past, the flowered grasses may be very beautiful

to look at as the sun shines on them, and the butterflies flutter and dip among them, but Robert's old mowers have only to do with the tough stalks, and the hard stones, that occasionally turn the edges of their scythes and tempers.

After performing this duty, Robert indulges himself with a lounge on the hay to the delight of the dogs, of which those belonging to the farm engage him in a spirited sham-fight ; while such canine strangers as are in the field look on from a distance wistfully, giving vent from time to time to their stifled longings by low whines and starts, and quiverings of their bodies.

The waggon, with its high load, now moves off towards the gate, under the directions of Mr. Wrigley, to the general confusion and scattering of the sun-bonnets and their guardians.

Robert comes across the field towards Susan, who ceases flirting with her lilac branch, and meets him demurely, evidently feeling sure he is going to speak to her.

He does, it is easy to perceive, ask Susan some question, and Susan, in answering it,

glances towards Hirell's window, and, as if involuntarily, Robert's glance turns in the same direction. He sees the dark, drooping head, against the white curtain.

His hat is lifted, and a wonderfully radiant face smiles towards her. From that sense of embarrassment with which we discover ourselves suddenly observed by the person we have been rather secretly and closely watching, Hirell blushes deeply, while nodding and returning Robert's look.

In this recognition—their first since the day of her coming—the eyes of each had a flash of pure, deep pleasure in them, which perhaps each would rather have concealed from the other ; but as Adam and Eve must have seen in each other's eyes some light of the lost Eden, Hirell could not look at Robert, or Robert at Hirell, suddenly, and without preparation, and not see some lingering glow and dew of a sweet morning, whose tender promise they had shared together, and which now might disappoint, but could never banish from their memories.

"We are old, old friends," says Hirell, coming from the window. Then in another

minute she peeps again, and sees the waggon staggering through the gate—Robert plodding away towards the hooded house, and Susan and the groom coming home with the empty cans—she guarding her head from the blows of the lilac branch, which he has captured from her.

By and bye comes a knock at Hirell's door. It is Susan, settling her cap and apron, and saying that breakfast is ready.

Here is the garden parlour, as usual, all comfort and brightness, and the fair, rich, matronly face rising from its pillow to welcome her. There begins to be a little patient sort of despair in its morning smile to Hirell. This morning, however, Hirell is to give her a moment of gentle triumph and delight, such as she has not known for many years. She has bent over her sofa and given the usual respectful, but cold and timid, greeting, when Mrs. Chamberlayne, instead of finding her hand set free, feels it held more and more tightly in warm and trembling fingers, and looking up at Hirell's eyes, finds them gazing at her with all the wildness and strangeness gone out of them.

“My darling child!” and she draws her gently down to kiss her again.

Hirell keeps back her face, with closed full eyes, and quivering lips, but as she sinks on her knees by the sofa, a sob, and with it a broken word, bursts from her, with more passion than Mrs. Chamberlayne believed to be in her nature—

“Un-grate-ful!”

CHAPTER XII.

ROBERT COMES TO TEA.

IN the evening of that same day on which the hay in the Star meadow was carried, Robert came to Brockhurst to tea.

His visit was quite unexpected by his mother, who was even more surprised than Hirell to see him entering the parlour, with an almost impudent enjoyment of their astonished looks in his blue eyes.

"Robert," said Mrs. Chamberlayne, laughing at the thought that it was so strange to see her son come uninvited into his own home, "is anything the matter?"

"Yes, I want a cup of tea," he answered.

"Well, don't be so defiant about it," said his mother. "Susan, fetch another cup and saucer."

He only said to Hirell, as he pressed her hand—

“I’m so glad you’re better,” but he managed to make her feel that there *was* hearty gladness in his voice and in his hands’ clasp, that made her ashamed of her own ingratitude for returning health.

He presently condescended to explain to Mrs. Chamberlayne that he had been hard at work, hoping to clear the Star meadow before night, and it had occurred to him he might as well save time by dropping in there for his tea instead of going all the way to the Rookery.

There was a low, round table, before Mrs. Chamberlayne’s sofa. Hirell was sitting at that side which was by the head of the sofa. Robert fetched one of the wicker chairs standing on the lawn, and seated himself on the other side of the table, half in and half out of the window.

It was an intensely hot evening, and tea was very pleasant to him in the old room again.

“This is nice,” he said, tilting back his chair, “to sit at a window that hasn’t a smothering straw-bonnet over it—full of cobwebs—and to

have a cup of tea that's not quite black or quite white."

"Now, Robert, it's of no use your trying to malign Mrs. Payne to me," answered his mother; "the very sight of you satisfies me as to her goodness and care. Could he dare, Hirell, to pass himself off as starved or neglected with that round full-moon of a face?"

The full-moon of a face looked comically at Hirell, whose thin, white cheek caught something of its brightness as she smiled faintly.

The heat and the scent of the syringa made her feel very languid; and her head began to ache with the thoughts that came crowding oppressively fast and thick through Robert's presence. There was his letter and its enclosure, which she had given into Kezia's care. He had never had any acknowledgment of it from her all this time. What must he think of *that* ingratitude? What must he think of her taste in allowing him to be the bearer of letters from Cunliff?

Of one thing she was very certain—and the fact was so far very satisfactory—Robert no longer loved her. Indeed, there was in his face so deep and tranquil a satisfaction—so

sunny a calm, that she asked herself if a newer and deeper love had not come to him, and taught him to smile at the folly of the old. But sometimes even finding that a thing proves to be as we would have it, is a secret pain as well as a satisfaction to us, and Hirell began to think herself a poor unworthy creature, since one lover had so soon and so easily put her from his heart, and the other—oh! would there never, never come a day which the galling bitterness of that remembrance could not reach and overrun?

A little while ago she might have rather scorned Robert in spite of herself for his happy changeableness; but her respect for him had wonderfully increased since she had watched him among his men that morning. Robert had been so little in the habit of talking of his own work, that Hirell had not been quite sure whether he lived the life of an idle gentleman at Nytimber. She rather suspected when she had heard him talk of his mother's foreman that such was really the case.

"You must get out in the fields before they're all cleared, Hirell," said Robert, helping himself to cream, which Hirell could only

be brought to distribute as so much gold. "If you promise to come to-morrow, I'll make them begin under the elms, so that you can sit in the shade, and have some shawls and lie down there."

"Thank you, Robert! I shall be very glad to come—only don't take any trouble for me," answered Hirell.

"As to that, I mean to take a good deal of trouble with you, Hirell," Robert said with a decision that rather astonished Mrs. Chamberlayne. "You must come to church next Sunday, if it's only to see the difference between our comfortable old vicar and Ephraim Jones. Then I want you to let me drive you over to Reculcester to see the shops and the cathedral. And it's only eight miles to the Bay—we must go there, and have dinner at Uncle Stephen's."

Mrs. Chamberlayne laughed.

"Why, Robert," she said, "whenever did you arrange all this round of dissipation for Hirell? You quite take our breath away."

"Well I don't mean to allow you the luxury of a companion invalid any longer, mother," answered Robert. "I'm under a pledge to get

Hirell strong with the least possible delay ; I shan't let her be moped up here any longer."

When he had said this he looked up at Hirell to see if she guessed whom he had pledged himself to about her ; and he saw a lovely faint flush spreading all over her pale face, and her lashes were trembling very low over her cheek.

He got up and took her hand.

"Good night, Hirell," he said, "things will all be right soon. I know what your father is where your happiness is concerned, better than you do ; only keep up your spirits and get well."

Then he kissed his mother, and went out with a parting nod to Hirell.

He went the garden way, and had scarcely reached the lawn when he heard a quick step behind him.

Turning, he saw Hirell coming to him, and looking very pale and troubled.

"Robert," said she, "I want to speak to you before you go."

Her hurry had made her breathless and wan-looking. Robert involuntarily made her take his arm, and walk very slowly up the

lawn, whose trees were now all in commotion with the home-coming birds; who, by the chattering and quarrelling, seemed to have brought more trophies from the teeming summer fields than could be made room for.

"Robert," said Hirell, trying to keep her voice calm, "I didn't know quite what you meant just now. I understood about your wish to make me go out, and help me to get strong—and I feel very grateful, and you may be sure that I will try. I have tried, Robert, but I will try more than I have done. But, Robert, will you tell me, please, what you meant about—about father just now?"

"O, I mean he'll come round," answered Robert rather confusedly.

"Come round to—to what, Robert?"

"He'll consent to your having Sir John Cunliff. Only let my mother and me do our best with him, and give him time, and I'm certain, Hirell, all will come right."

"Robert!"

She had snatched her hand from his arm, and stood confronting him, looking at him with bright angry eyes.

"Write to father, if you dare! Speak

to me about marrying Sir John Cunliff again if you dare! Understand, once for all, he's not what you or any of you think. Understand, Robert, if my father went on his knees to ask me to marry that man I would not do it!"

Robert felt his senses so hopelessly confused by this outburst that he could at first do nothing but gaze on Hirell's face with a sort of stupor. Gradually, however, there came to him a sense of the deception that must have been practised upon him; and with it a kindling anger that began to burn more and more hotly, though he turned his eyes away that Hirell might not see it.

"O Robert," she said, her voice suddenly weak again and gentle, "how rude, how ill-tempered I am! What a return I make for your kindness. Forgive me—only, pray say no more about this."

"Then I'm to understand, Hirell, that your refusal of Sir John Cunliff comes from yourself alone."

"It does, Robert, quite from myself. I have found he is unworthy to be my father's son, and he shall not be. No, he shall not be."

"Then you have ceased to care for him, Hirell?"

She looked up at Robert's face with a glance of kindly but irrepressible contempt—as if she would ask him if he thought her love were as easily disposed of as his own.

"No," she said, "I have *not* ceased to care for him—nor shall I ever. O Robert! we are not all made alike in this world."

Robert smiled a very serious, short-lived sort of smile as he thought how wide of its mark her little arrow had fallen.

He had been leading her back to the house, and by this time they had reached the parlour window.

"Well, good-night," he said. "I shall write the instant I get home and retract my promise."

And the letter was written and posted that night.

CHAPTER XIII.

NEWS FROM HOME.

THE next morning when Mrs. Chamberlayne was looking over her letters, with her usual gentle excitement—it was her one excitement of the day—she found among them the following letter from Bod Elian, for Hirell, and handed it to her.

It was from Hugh—the first she had received from him since the beginning of his troubles.

“Bod Elian.

“MY DEAR HIRELL,

“I wonder which is the most truly selfish, the ambition which makes us feel the world to be all ours, or the tender grief for ourselves that comes after ambition’s fall; when we realize that even the little chimney nook to which that world is shrunk—that

nook that once was ours is ours no longer—that we have no sound right to it. And that is what I feel now, after my return.

“Forgive me—pray forgive me, that I have been too much engrossed, too much puffed up, and too much overwhelmed, to be able to write as I promised you. The collapse for the moment has been complete. My worst enemy could wish nothing worse for me than I feel, unless it were to come and sing some song of triumph under my windows.

“Hirell, I feel something swell dangerously in my throat, when I contrast the tender mercies of our fellow-men outside, with the loving-kindness of my brother, his consideration, his boundless charity.

“And I used to think him hard. God help me, it was the life that was hard—the life that he and all of us were condemned to.

“When I returned—looking like a skeleton, Kezia says—dreading the very sight of him, and picturing to myself the black, gloomy place, destitute of common comforts, and made more destitute by the loss of the delusive hopes I had raised, while this was my state, I was carried into what seemed for

the moment to my fancy a domestic paradise. The room was unusually light, there were flowers on the table ; everything, in a word, was as if for a feast. That big-boned, big-voiced Christian, with a still bigger heart, Ephraim Jones, I suspect had some hand in this. When I could speak, I told Elias that I thought it was only a more refined mode of punishment, and that he need not fear it was sufficient.

“ I had to go to bed, and from thence did not rise till yesterday week, and to-day I will write to you, I hope words of comfort.

“ Hirell, I live again. This first failure has humiliated, but shall *not* destroy me. It is one of the dreams of the Saxon's egotism that nobody but he is strong ; and in measuring strength he brutally mixes up all kinds of the most incongruous natures for comparison, and then judges them by his own narrow standard. My brief experience has taught me that however difficult the world is, however full of pitfalls, a man may still make way, if, with ambition, and the talent that justifies it, he has good sense, and fixed principle ; and, to revert to myself, if he can

tread down under his feet the artist's deadliest enemy, Pleasure.

"And now for a secret ; or rather for a whole nest of secrets. I am going away to-morrow. I am going away secretly. I am not going to please myself, for I would gladly have stayed here a few weeks to feel that I and my mother-land were once again reconciled ; and yet I must go. And upon all these secrets comes another and greater one that explains them, and which you ought to know.

"Hirell, I have long and dearly loved Kezia.

"Elias knew of this long ago, and promised to speak for me. He has fulfilled that promise faithfully, but somehow my love by proxy did not get on ; and he wrote to me when I was in the full of my mad holiday to say I had better come and see to the affair myself as soon as I *justly* could.

"In returning—broken alike in heart and fortune, as it seemed—I had secretly the faintest gleam of light still cheering me about Kezia. Her conduct when I did come was strange. It was tender, motherly, but accompanied with a certain restraint that I,

exquisite coxcomb! fancied was maidenly consciousness of love.

"It was no time for a pauper to talk, or dream; and I was silent enough, though always thinking, one minute of Kezia, and the next of my second venture forth.

"Last night, or rather about half an hour after midnight, I felt very restless; and got up with a strong inclination to see if my brother were awake, and would talk to me.

"Wishing not to disturb him if he were asleep, or Kezia, who would have fancied me ill, I trod as if my feet were shod with cotton wool; went to his door, which as you know he often leaves ajar for air, pushed it open, and went in. The room was in absolute darkness. I was instantly arrested by the sound of his voice. And, to judge by the sound, he was kneeling, I think, at the bedside; and praying, according to his habit, aloud, that is to say in a low, monotonous, but painfully earnest tone, which would not be heard by any one in the house, less favourably situated than I was.

"I thought it would do me no harm to

share in that which he was saying. Believe me, Hirell, I would not for the world have stayed to listen but in that spirit.

“His prayer lasted for some time, was too fine for me *now* to go into, but deeply interesting, without however any special application to myself, which I cannot say I desired.

“He had finished, or appeared to have done so by the pause, and I should have spoken, but that I knew he had not risen, and might therefore be still continuing, as I have often known him do, to pray in silence ; as if there were subjects too holy, too mysterious, for the soiling of mortal words. Presently he broke out again, and the mere sound of the voice, so broken with trouble, seemed to warn me instinctively of something I needed to hear. As nearly as I can repeat his words, they were these :

“ ‘ Lord, Thou knowest his heart and mine. Thou knowest his present affliction. Have I not asked Thee, besought Thee, wrestled with Thee, that Thou shouldest raise him up, and comfort him, and make him as one meet for Thy service ? Have I not, O Lord, con-

fessed that I know not whether these his aims are good, and left him with Thee and his own conscience? Thou gavest him his gifts. I am bound to believe thou knowest well for what purpose. But now, O Lord, help me; enlighten me about Thine handmaid. Thou canst look into the heart and judge it; O Father, judge mine! If it be the desire of the flesh, the pride of the eye, the delusions of the soul, that have moved me; if I have been unfaithful to this my brother; if I have turned her heart from him for my own gain, let me bend before Thee, and receive the chastisement due to me, even while I implore thy pardon and mercy, O Lord! the lad loves this Thine handmaiden. What must I do? Can I, in his present low estate, tell him she inclines not to him? That she is wounded if I plead for him; that in spite of thy servant's unworthiness, she has thought to succeed in this Thy house to the love, and the duties, and holy responsibilities of that dear Saint now in Thy bosom?

“Hirell, you will judge it was time for me to go out of that room, and I went. You will judge it is time for me to go out of that

house, and I depart to-morrow. I have written to them both ; how I need not say. Their path henceforth is I think made clear. Another dream killed ! How many more murders of the innocents must there be ?

“ Hirell, dearest friend, sister, write to me. I have no one but you to tell all this to, and expect some comforting words from in answer. I cannot express to you how I long to feel I have still the wise, kind, holy little sister I have always had in you. Sometimes I feel as if you must be indeed my sister, and your father my father, for was ever brother to brother what he has been to me ? When I first came home and heard of your illness, and unhappiness, and lay so ill myself in your little room, looking hour after hour at the “ Virgin Martyr,” and the texts on your walls, I used to think how we had both had our dearest wish, and got away from home, and then I used to wonder if we were only to come back to it to die of our experiences. But thank God we are not doomed to stand merely as sad remembrances to those who love us. We are to live it seems, and work,

and suffer, ah, yes, to suffer for them. Give my love to Bob, and ask him if he can manage to let me see him in London. Dear Hirell, how I wish—how I know they all wish you could have made him happy. He's one in a thousand—one in a million I should say. We only quarrelled on one matter, Bob would never own whether he cared for the harp or not, and used to be offended when I applied my favourite verses to him. You know what I mean :

“ ‘ The man to whom the harp is dear,
Who loves the sound of song and ode,
Will cherish all that's cherished there,
Where angels hold their blest abode.

“ ‘ But he who loves not tune or strain,
Nature to him no love has given ;
You'll see him while his days remains,
Hateful at once to earth and Heaven.’

“ You can make Bob very angry by repeating this if you like. He always says it's mere Welsh poets' nonsense ; and that a man may love music yet be a great rogue, or dislike music and yet be a very good fellow, a shocking notion of Bob's ; Saxon to the core. Root it out of him if you can.

house, and I depart to-morrow. I have written to them both; how I need not say. Their path henceforth is I think made clear. Another dream killed! How many more murders of the innocents must there be?

“Hirell, dearest friend, sister, write to me. I have no one but you to tell all this to, and expect some comforting words from in answer. I cannot express to you how I long to feel I have still the wise, kind, holy little sister I have always had in you. Sometimes I feel as if you must be indeed my sister, and your father my father, for was ever brother to brother what he has been to me? When I first came home and heard of your illness, and unhappiness, and lay so ill myself in your little room, looking hour after hour at the “Virgin Martyr,” and the texts on your walls, I used to think how we had both had our dearest wish, and got away from home, and then I used to wonder how we were to come back to it to see each other again. But thank God we are home now. I am merely as sad as you are, and I love you. We are all well. It is so dark,

CHAPTER XIV.

OLD FRIENDS.

ONE morning, a week after Sir John Cunliff had left Kent, when Mrs. Chamberlayne had had her couch moved into the garden, Hirell came in through the window for something for her work-basket, and to her surprise saw Robert leaning over the table—his head buried in the sheets of a newspaper.

“Good morning, Robert,” she said, “Aunt’s out under your pear tree. I suppose you wondered where we’d all gone?”

Robert coughed—a little nervous cough quite unusual to him—then looking up, half folded the paper, and came towards her with it.

“This was sent to me by post this morning—of course it’s intended for you.”

He spoke quickly, but gravely; and she

“Good-bye, now, dear Hirell ; it is striking
two ; by four I must be beyond Dolgarrog.

“Ever affectionately yours,

“HUGH MORGAN.”

CHAPTER XIV.

OLD FRIENDS.

ONE morning, a week after Sir John Cunliff had left Kent, when Mrs. Chamberlayne had had her couch moved into the garden, Hirell came in through the window for something for her work-basket, and to her surprise saw Robert leaning over the table—his head buried in the sheets of a newspaper.

“Good morning, Robert,” she said, “Aunt’s out under your pear tree. I suppose you wondered where we’d all gone?”

Robert coughed—a little nervous cough quite unusual to him—then looking up, half folded the paper, and came towards her with it.

“This was sent to me by post this morning—of course it’s intended for you.”

He spoke quickly, but gravely; and she

good and kind to mention it, and I have been too ill—too cowardly—and so you have not had a word of my thanks, of my great, great gratitude—for your unlooked-for goodness to him. Oh ! you were so good to him, when I—I had to be so cruel. It is remembered—it is treasured. God bless you for it, Robert.”

His eyes again met hers, as if against his will, and were withdrawn.

“ I must tell you now, Robert, as this has come to be spoken of by us,” said Hirell, “ that everything which I have had to forgive in him has been long, long ago forgiven—so don’t say anything to me again about forgiving him—it pains me for anyone to think I have resentment against him. And I must tell you that I must not marry him, Robert, because—Robert, there are these reasons against it. The more I see of the world, the more I love my father—the more rare and beautiful the holiness of his life seems to me ; and I think God means me to look to him as I always had done till—till *he* came. I think that I am to look to him, and find help for my weakness and faithfulness in the Daniel-like

strength and faith of his spirit. I feel, Robert, that utterly removed from him I should be like that leaf rustling upon the carpet there, ready to be borne away by the first wind that blows. And *he*, Robert, *would* part us absolutely, entirely. I am sure of it—I am indeed—though perhaps he would not own it to himself. I know it would come to that—I have felt it all along—the ‘still small voice’ has said all along to me, ‘Hirell, it will be so—you know it’—and, Robert, I do know it.”

She was silent, and Robert did not turn his head. He seemed to know that she had tears and sobs to struggle with, though she *was* silent. And soon he heard her voice again so low and so sweet, and chastened like birds’ voices after a storm.

“Then another reason against my marrying him is, that if we were married, and anything made him impatient with me, and he should speak an unkind word to me, as of course in this life, where no voice can be always music to us, I must expect he will do, often, or sometimes—then, instead of being to me as it might to another, or *from* another—quickly

forgotten and forgiven—there is something I should be reminded of by the lightest tone of harshness, the least word of impatience from his lips—Robert, there is something which I should remember—which would come back to me at such a moment, and make the hasty word, or tone, or look, full of such bitter terrible meaning—it would say to me did he not warn me himself that I was not fit to—. I should tear the wedding-ring from my hand—I should die or I should become mad! Oh, it is so much better *as it is*. As it is I can forgive and bless him. If I were married to him I might learn *not* to forgive, and *not* to bless him.”

Robert struck the *Reculcester Guardian* which he held in one hand an impatient blow with the back of the other, but his averted face was very serious and sympathetic.

“Now that I have told you this, Robert, you won’t think me obstinate, or resentful, or unkind,” said Hirell, “in keeping to my resolution, will you?—and you won’t—oh, that pains me so much—you won’t be always expecting me to change towards him? I *have* resolved—and you know that even when I

was a little girl, when I made a solemn promise to myself I *did* keep it—you remember, don't you, Robert?"

Robert did lift his eyes to hers now, with a long gentle look that reminded Hirell of a certain childish promise which assuredly had *not* been unbroken—but she thought the remembrance had come to her from herself, and not that Robert's eyes had anything to do with it, and it passed as quickly from her mind as the faint flush it had brought passed from her cheek.

That, however, returned again as Robert, after a short cough and another hit at the *Guardian*, said,

"But you care for him still—you will only be miserable all your life."

"I hope not, Robert," she answered. "I care for him, but I hope my life will not be miserable through caring for him. You must not think that because the pleasure you have given me in bringing me this paper was a painful one, that such news of him will not some day be a pleasure free from any pain. I feel that it will, but at present my loss is fresh to me. When I am strong and go back home,

I shall try and work very hard for them. I shall work in the fields as you do, making my pleasure out of it—though neither I nor my fields will ever reflect the rich sunshine of God as you and yours do, Robert. It has been a great pleasure to me, seeing you so happy.”

“There are such things as fool’s paradises,” answered Robert.

“I don’t think *you* have to do with any such places, Robert. I think that the life you lead might have been planned by King Solomon in the very flower of his wisdom.”

Robert’s hand that hung over the arm of his chair swung quickly to and fro as if beating an imaginary tambourine—but he said nothing.

“I think you are vexed with me, Robert,” Hirell said, looking at him anxiously. “Is it about this paper being sent to you? Indeed it is far from being my wish that you should be troubled in this way.”

“No, I am not vexed—that’s not the word for it,” Robert answered; “that seems to mean some peevish sort of annoyance. You

were agitated—you turned quite pale when I gave you that paper because it was from some one you have loved a few months, and who loves you—but suppose—” and he turned his head, and looked full and steadily at her—“suppose you had it from another woman who pretends to love him, and looks to you to give it to him—what should you feel then—especially if, instead of a few months, you had loved him for many years, as I have loved you?”

“Oh, Robert! that is past.”

“Is it? I have yet to learn that, Hirell.”

They looked at each other a moment, she scarcely believing him, and he wondering sadly how she could have doubted. Then she bent her head, and pressed her hands together beneath the table in much distress.

“Oh, Robert! I hope I did not deceive you in any way when you spoke to me last September. Oh, I should be so grieved if—”

“You did not deceive me, Hirell. If deceived I deceived myself. You know how much easier it is to me to look on the best side of

things ; and, as to your being grieved, rather than that—I would have let you go on, thinking my love no stronger, and no more enduring than you evidently have thought it.”

Hirell put her thin little hands to her face, saying,

“ This makes it worse and worse, Robert, my coming here, and being a burthen to you, and a pain, through him ; through those letters ; but I didn’t know ; I didn’t know. I never thought he would find out where I had gone for one thing ; believe me, I could never have endured the thought of his coming to *your* house with letters and messages for me. And, when you spoke to me last year, I did not think for a moment that you were much disappointed by my answer ; and the next hour I seemed to understand why you had spoken. I thought then you did not love me at all, and it was only your generous wish to be in a position to give you the right of helping us that made you speak to me. Oh, I beg your pardon, Robert. You have much to forgive me for.”

“ What have I to forgive you for, Hirell ?”

said Robert, in a voice that had in it a strange mingling of self-contempt and tender generosity ; "for being the means of keeping me to one ambition ; that of making my home, and fortune, and my own life more worthy of you. Are they too good now, either of them, under their improvements ? When I spoke to you it was altogether too sudden. I could not help myself. But I did not look on it as a fair answer from you. I hoped for a different one next time I should ask the same question. When I heard suddenly you were engaged to him whom I was fool enough to take to your house, of course I turned a nuisance to myself, and everybody else. When I heard that there was some trouble connected with the engagement, I supposed through your father, and you came here to us, you did me more good than anything else could have done. I thought if it is a brother and friend she wants, she shall have a right sound and faithful one. I went to your father to reason with him, and I often met Cunliff here, and told him not to be cast down. Yes, I offered

my comfort, when he had *your* love. O, Hirell !”

“Robert !” cried Hirell, her face very white and streaming with tears, as she held out with a despairing gesture both her hands towards him ; “take the thanks, the poor, poor thanks of one who has nothing else to offer you for all your goodness to her ! Nothing, Robert, nothing ; no love ; no hope.”

“Then if *I* am satisfied with the poor, poor thanks,” said Robert, laying the little hands together, and holding them very gently and reverentially in his own, “Will *you* be ? or will you give me also the pain of seeing that you take your confidence from me, and look upon me as not to be trusted as your friend, because there happens to be in me more friendliness for you than you care to accept ? Here is, certainly, much of it, Hirell ; but only take what you want, and leave the rest. It will, always be here for you.”

“Ah, yes, I *do* trust you, and I will always, Robert. But you must not mind me going home. I *must* go ; indeed I must.”

“Then you shall go, and I will take you. When *must* you go ?”

"This—no, to-morrow—I should *so* like to go to-morrow ; but—but, indeed, I could go by myself."

"Hirell," said Robert, in a tone of tender reproach.

"Then please take me."

CHAPTER XV.

ROBERT SETS HIS AFFAIRS IN ORDER.

ROBERT when he went away from Brockhurst that morning found a certain sense of relief in the fact that he would not have five minutes' time on his hands till the moment when he should depart with Hirell for Wales.

Nothing had been settled as to the exact train they were to go by, but in his own mind he fixed on one that started from Reculcester at about half-past nine in the morning. He knew that Hirell would look to him to arrange for her to go as soon as possible, yet he knew she would not wish to give his mother such surprise and uneasiness as going that same day would assuredly cause her. He got the exact time of the train from Wrigley, the foreman, and decided that he would go back

to Brockhurst in the afternoon, and have it settled.

He did not go to the hooded house for that formidable noonday meal which Mrs. Payne made so much ado about ; he felt very little inclined for the sight of it or her, but he persuaded himself it was want of time, not appetite, that kept him away.

So he busied himself in helping to move a light fence that was in the way of the mowers, and this taking him about two hours, brought him to the time when he knew Hirell and his mother would have taken their work and books, and settled themselves under the trees on the lawn. Then he went round to the garden door, and came upon them in a hurried, business-like, matter-of-fact way, asking Hirell if the morning train would suit her.

"Very well indeed, Robert, thank you," she answered ; and Robert seeing that they had both been crying, became more in a hurry than ever.

"Then I'll be round with the trap at eight," he said, and left them without another word.

And now that that duty was over, there

was still the rest of the hot June afternoon and long June evening to get through. He must not go home till he was obliged—home to the dreary, unfurnished house, with its gloomy darkened windows and cobwebbed ceilings, and unnatural silence, broken only by the slipshod tread of Mrs. Payne on the stairs, and in the great empty rooms. No, that must be put off as long as it possibly could be. Besides, had he not the new stands for the ricks to place, as well as the rick in the south yard to finish? And there was the mare, that had got slightly hurt with the pitchfork, to be taken over to the veterinary surgeon at Ninfield.

By four o'clock the new stands were ready, and were being admired by all who had assisted with them; and Robert had some hay brought to show how the foundations of the ricks were to be managed.

After this he went the round of the hay-fields, and had some tea brought out to him from Brockhurst kitchen. Then he finished in the south yard, and set off for Ninfield with the mare.

The surgeon advised that she should be left,

and sent for the next morning, so Robert had to walk home.

Ninfield is the nearest post town to Nytimber, which has no post-office of its own, and Robert, recollecting he would be gone before the letters reached home in the morning, thought he would call in for them as he passed the little shop. The postmaster left counting a pound of candles for a little girl, to attend to Robert; and when he had given him what letters he had for him, he asked, to Robert's great surprise, if Sir John Cunliff was staying at Nytimber.

"Certainly not," said Robert, "he's been gone above a week."

Then the postmaster told him that some poor man had done nothing but tramp from here to Reculcester, and back again from Reculcester here, in search of Sir John, the whole week.

Uneasy wild ideas about Elias, floated through Robert's mind as he went home. He soon dismissed them as he saw their absurdity. If Elias wanted Cunliff, he would certainly have gone to Nytimber first. Then he remembered some man had come making

enquiries of Mrs. Payne about Cunliff, the day after his departure; and Robert had taken no notice of it at the time, thinking the man was probably some public-house hanger on, whom Cunliff had employed on some errand and forgotten to pay. In all probability this was the same man who had been so persistent in his enquiry at Ninfield, and as Robert remembered his appearance, he was able to dismiss all fears about Elias.

When he got home it was past nine, but still light, and though he was very tired, he nevertheless felt a great reluctance to go into the hooded house. He had now seen to all that required his attention before a day's absence; but there was upon him a strange fit of carefulness, an anxiety that nothing should be neglected, and a strong wish to leave all things in as much order as possible.

He had not the slightest idea of staying away an hour longer than he was obliged, yet he found himself arranging things so that work could go on a week or two without him.

He showed this so plainly by wanting things done which did not matter for some

time to come, that his men were all of one mind as to his secret intention of making his absence longer than he said it would be.

Robert himself was not a little puzzled by the mood that was upon him. He had never experienced it before on the eve of a journey to Wales or anywhere else. He could not tell *why* he was anxious about the padlock being put on the gate of the three-acre field, when the sheep were not to be turned into it for a fortnight, he only felt that he *was* anxious, and should think and fidget about it if it were not done. Rather than neglect it when he found he really had not courage to knock again at the door of Wrigley's cottage, (he had already disturbed him three times since his return from Ninfield,) he got a padlock and chain, and went himself to put it on the gate.

He did not return across the fields, but round by the road past the pound and the Hop Pole.

The moon had risen, and the hay-fields looked very pleasant under its soft light. There seemed an air of peace and order over all things, that was soothing to Robert's

restless mind, which grew quieter and more satisfied as he walked home along the silent road.

When he got past the Hop Pole he saw a figure approaching from the opposite side, and quickly recognized it as belonging to one whom he could not pass by.

“Sir John Cunliff!”

“I am glad to have found you at last, Mr. Chamberlayne, I have been waiting more than an hour at your house. Is it not rather strange that none of your people could find you?”

Sir John spoke in a half irritable, half satirical tone, that astonished Robert even more than it annoyed him.

“Well, I don’t know that it’s very strange, Sir John,” he answered, “considering that my people—my only available people at this hour, consist of poor rheumatic old Mrs. Payne, and her little nephew.”

Robert had determined that he would not be the first to hold out his hand after such a salutation from Sir John, but he soon saw there was to be no hand-shaking for them that night.

"No doubt you have been surprised at not seeing me down before, Mr. Chamberlayne?"

"Not at all," said Robert, "I am only surprised at seeing you here now."

They had begun to walk slowly by the side of the churchyard wall; suddenly Cunliff stopped, and said almost fiercely:—

"Did you think I would receive such a letter as yours without demanding an explanation?"

"Yes," answered Robert, trying to keep down the bitterness and contempt that seemed as if it would burst from him or choke him; "I did think you would be careful enough of what self-respect you may have left to do so."

"Then," replied Cunliff growing more calm as Robert became more excited, "you are greatly mistaken. I do most undoubtedly demand to hear your reasons for writing me such a letter."

"Very well, hear them if you wish. Certain representations of yours caused me to undertake for another's sake a most unwelcome office. When you had gone, I discovered that those representations were false, and I

wrote immediately and told you I withdrew my promise; there's your explanation, Sir John!"

And Robert made as if he would continue his walk homeward, but Cunliff again stood in his path.

"Mr. Chamberlayne, you have most grossly misunderstood either those representations of mine you mention, or the person who has made you believe them to be untrue. I shall certainly require you to go for my benefit more fully into your motives for this sudden and not exactly honourable charge."

Robert turned with the full intention of giving Sir John a very much plainer explanation than he had yet given, one that he should find it impossible to misunderstand; but as he turned, he saw a man standing watching them; apparently he had been there some little time, observing them with great interest.

When he saw he was noticed he came close to them, and looked with quiet earnest scrutiny first at one and then the other.

Robert recognised him then as the stranger who had inquired after Sir John, of the hay-

makers some days ago ; and as the same too, he had no doubt, who had so beset the post-master at Ninfield all the week.

He was a short man with unusually broad shoulders, round back, and head projecting forwards. The eyes that looked at Cunliff and Chamberlayne were large, of a greenish grey, and were blood-shot and heavy, as if with fatigue and want of sleep. Yet there was a restless wild sort of light in them ; a fire that must long have destroyed sleep ; that must have made the lids throb and ache, when they tried to keep closed. Dust, damp and sun had dyed his clothes to the usual hue of the tramp's livery, mud colour. The sole and upper leather of one boot had come apart, and an inflamed bleeding foot appeared between.

Chamberlayne felt an inward shrinking as the man looked at him, and thought to himself that if he had come with the lowest of tramps to the hop-picking, he should send him away with a shilling in his pocket rather than employ him.

Cunliff looked at him with less disgust,

and more curiosity, and a vague feeling of having seen him before.

When he had given that piercing look into the face of each, the man asked in a civil quiet voice, that seemed about as weary as the rest of him,—

“I ask pardon, gentlemen, but will you tell me which of you two might be Sir John Cunliff, Bart., the new member for the borough of ——?”

He said “Bart.” as if it were an indispensable part of the name.

“I am, my man, what do you want with me?” said Sir John.

The man went a step closer to him, and his eyes seemed to see nothing else now than Cunliff’s face. When he spoke his voice was much deeper, much more laboured.

“Will you grant a poor man a few words with you in private, Sir John Cunliff, Bart. ? I’ve come a long way, I’ve come from your own place, I’ve come a purpose for a few words with you.”

“Out with them then,” said Cunliff, “this is quite as private as needs be, my man. What is it you want to ask me ?”

Robert had by no means any very friendly feelings towards Sir John just then, but he did not quite care to offer to leave him alone at this deserted end of the village, with a character by whom he was so unpleasantly impressed. He leaned, half sitting, on the low churchyard wall, and watched the man closely.

He remained silent a moment or two after he saw that Sir John was not going to grant him a private interview, looked on the ground, then at Robert, then once more brought his bright blood-shot gaze back to Cunliff's face, and said,—

“I'm a tenant of yourn, I used to live at Prospect Cottages, about a mile from Werge Castle. Can you call 'em to mind, Prospect Cottages? P'raps you don't know you've got such things on the estate. P'raps if you've seen 'em you didn't know 'em from pig-styes. A good many don't when they see 'em.”

Sir John began to feel hot and uncomfortable, and to wish Robert had not waited. These were the very cottages he had had such endless complaints about. He knew them well enough, though he answered the

man's look with one proudly, almost insolently calm, when contrasted with the ungovernable passion of the other's face.

"P'raps you don't know 'em," he went on, "I hardly think myself as you do, but it lays between you and another, and I've come to you as a gentleman I can hear the truth from. I want to know whether you or the devil in the shape o' that man Jarman, is responsible for the state o' them holes you call Prospect Cottages ; and responsible for bullying and threatening the rent out of the poor wretches as tenants 'em, bullying and threatening it out penny by penny ! I don't say it's you, I don't believe it's you, but I want to *know*—I want to be able to give Jarman his lies back in his own throat if it's him, which he swears it isn't."

"My man," said Cunliff with sudden seriousness and decision, "whatever you have to say—which I advise you to shorten as much as possible—say to me. I am alone entirely responsible for the things you mention. Jarman acts only under my orders. You would be a great coward as well as a fool to annoy him with your complaints."

He paused a moment intending to speak of contemplated improvements and perhaps some compensation, but the prolonged and peculiar gaze of the man's eyes on his face stopped him, and made him say sharply :—

“Come now, an end of this if you please! You've been seeking me to ask me for money, is that it? Well, what is it you're in want of?”

“What is it I'm in want of?” repeated the man without moving his eyes. “Well I'm very poor, sir. Now I think of it, I've nothing left but—but something as belongs to you.”

“To me? well what is that?”

The man withdrew his eyes then, and glancing furtively at Robert, began to feel in his pocket.

Then letting his hand remain there, he looked up at Cunliff again, and said—

“Well, you asked me—you kindly asked me—Sir John Cunliff, Bart., what money it is as I stand in need of. I have made my reckonings, I have considered what would make up to me for my wife's death, which between you and me and the Almighty—Sir

John Cunliff, Bart.—came of that sty we lived in ; of that and Jarman's d—d bullying tongue, and nothing else, let doctors put what cheating Latin name to it they like. I've reckoned her death, and the babby's at her stone cold breast, and my twin lads, born strong and hardy—so help me God—and my little eldest wench, the flower of the flock, the apple o' my eye ! All within a year o' their mother. Sir John Cunliff, Bart., I have made my reckonings, and I find nothing will pay me—no mortal money—nothing, Sir John Cunliff, Bart., but your cursed, lazy, profligate, murderous life !”

His hand flew from the pocket wherein it had been hidden ; a pistol was levelled at Cunliff, who was quite off his guard, for he had not been able to follow the man in his thick, passionate speech, and had not the slightest idea of his danger till he saw the pistol, heard a cry from Robert, saw him rush to strike at the extended arm. But even Robert, watchful of the man and quick as he had been, was not in time—or at least was only in time to make the aim swerve, and himself receive the shot.

He fell first to the wall, rested there an instant, then dropped heavily to the ground.

At that sight Cunliff leapt upon the man with the ferocity of a wild beast, and just prevented him firing a second time.

They struggled for some moments very fiercely. At first Cunliff had the best of it; but as soon as the man understood his antagonist, and in what way he was strongest or weakest, he began to have mastery over him. He seemed possessed by a kind of demoniac strength and spring. At last Cunliff feared he would really be able to get his hand free and fire, but at that moment they were so near Robert that the latter—helpless as he was—managed to seize the man's neck from behind, and hold his head down to the ground. Then Sir John got possession of the pistol, and struck the assassin a blow that partly stunned him.

He next ran to the "Hop Pole" Inn, that was only a few yards off, and brought back the landlord and one or two of Robert's own men that were sitting in the general bar-room and kitchen.

When they reached the spot where Robert

lay, they found the man standing up looking about him in a sort of stupor, and putting his hand to his bleeding forehead.

He made no sort of resistance when the landlord gave directions for him to be locked up in an out-house, till the police at Ninfield could be sent to in the morning.

While this was being done Cunliff was on his knees examining Robert's wound. It was in the right shoulder, the ball having passed completely through.

Where was the nearest surgeon, Sir John demanded, with great agitation, as he looked up from the broad chest covered with blood.

There was a surgeon living at Ninfield, but he was away on the continent ; so that none nearer than Mrs. Chamberlayne's own doctor at Reculcester could be thought of, and he never went out at night.

"What is his name ? He shall come out to-night if he values his life," said Sir John. Then he told one of Robert's men to get him Robert's black horse from the stables at the hooded house.

Clutterbuck, the landlord of the "Hop Pole," had gone to unhook his long swing

shutter to lay Robert on. Sir John bent over him, and whispered—

“I feel what a life has been risked in saving mine. Try and forgive me, Robert Chamberlayne.”

Robert's white lips smiled, and he gave Sir John's hand a very genial, but cold, weak grasp, and said,—

“Let them fetch Wrigley. Let him go home first to tell—my mother.”

Wrigley, with whom Robert was always quarrelling, had already been called, and was standing close to him.

He was much touched by Robert's asking for him before any one else, and hurried away without a word to fulfil his request. He knew the story he had to tell, that Mr. Robert had got hurt in saving Sir John Cunliff from a madman, who had tried to shoot him.

By the time he came back Sir John had gone off on Robert's horse for the surgeon, though not before he had helped to place him on the rude litter that had been prepared for him.

Robert did not lose consciousness ; he saw as one in a painful trance the sights familiar

from his childhood—the pound, the stocks, the church, the little cottages, the crowds of ricks, and the hay-fields. He noticed all as they bore him slowly down the village. He felt that he understood now his anxiety to set all his affairs in order. It was a strange foretaste of what was coming. He was glad now to think of all that he had done that day.

The rick in the south yard looked mellow and fair in the moonlight ; and it was pleasant to him as his languid eyes rested on the soft undulating lines of raked hay in the fields, to think that the new stands were all ready for it, and it could all be managed so well without him. He was even pleased to think of the padlock and chain he had put on the gate of the three-acre field.

When the little procession stopped at Brockhurst, Robert's senses were a good deal confused by the lights, and by the figures standing in the hall.

He did not know whether they had carried him upstairs or not. He only knew that his mother and Hirell were standing or kneeling beside him, and that he tried to speak.

ROBERT SETS HIS AFFAIRS IN ORDER. 231

He did speak, but fainted away as soon as as he had said to Hirell, with a smile—

“ You must let me sleep at home to-night.”

CHAPTER XVI.

LEAVE-TAKINGS AT BROCKHURST.

MRS. CHAMBERLAYNE behaved very bravely the first night, but the shock of Robert's accident, and the exertion it caused her to make proved too much for her. The next day she was too ill to sit up, and her great anxiety to be at her son's bedside made her worse.

When Mrs. Payne of the hooded house heard that a nurse for Robert was being sought, she came over with her little bundle, and entreated with tears to be allowed to take her place in his room. Knowing nothing of her short-comings from Robert, they allowed her to do so, and she proved a miracle of patience and devotion.

Hirell's journey was indefinitely postponed.

She could not leave Brockhurst while its master and mistress both lay ill, and unable to help each other.

It was a source of great bitterness to her that all this trouble had been brought upon the house through her, and she tried hard to do as much good and be as great a comfort to them as possible.

She managed all the house very cleverly and quietly. The doctor, and all who came to inquire after Robert, spoke of her with high praise.

One day a letter from her father enclosed the following from Cunliff.

“MY DEAR HIRELL—

“Forgive me for troubling you, at a time when you must unite with those around you in wishing you had never met me or heard my name. I wish, however, to give you a few particulars as to the end of this sad business, which has, I fear, lost me any lingering esteem you may have had left for me, and gained more than I dare think of for the brave saviour of my unworthy life. I know that both of you will feel far more with the

outraged tenant than the outraged landlord, and that you will be glad to hear I have procured his discharge, and sent him off to Australia, with means that will give him a fair chance of beginning a new life. I arrived at Ninfield prison with his discharge, just in time to prevent the poor fellow from committing suicide. At first he cared little for his release, but when I had talked to him, confessing my own negligence, and showed him what sad and unlooked-for results had come of his vengeful resolution ; and when from my questions to him I discovered there was still one thing dear to him left in the world, and that he could benefit that thing by living and accepting my assistance, so much less than what I really owe him, he came round, listened to reason, yielded to reason. The 'one ewe lamb' proved to be a certain small deformed nephew, the superintendence of whose small outfit was the first thing that brought a gleam of interest on his uncle's face—whose small form he carried on board in his arms, and whose small hand waved me a friendly farewell as the vessel sailed away. Little peacemaker ! May he live to outgrow bigger and

better suits than the new corduroy ones that gave him so much pleasure !

“And now, Hirell, I must confess I have another motive for writing to you. I wish to tell you, as I have told your father in the letter that goes to him with this, that I shall seek you at his house on your return there, to receive your final answer. I claim such a meeting as due to me, even were my offences a thousand times greater than they are. I entreat that you send me no answer to this, at least not that answer which I fear under present circumstances would only be such a one as must destroy the hope that still lives in me, though perhaps it should long since have given up the ghost. But whilst I live, and whilst *you* live, Hirell, it never will. But even if you do send me such an answer I will not take it. No. I demand a meeting at your father’s house. If you desire it to be a last one, you can make it so. Never will I molest you after that, if your heart remains hardened against me still.

“If Robert Chamberlayne will accept my hearty regards, give him them ; and remember, Hirell, it may some day be in your power to

make us as warm friends as fate seems determined we should be.

“Yours faithfully,

“J. R. CUNLIFF.”

Hirell found on reading her father's letter that he had replied to Cunliff instantly, complying with his request, which he told his daughter was a natural and manly one, and that he would not have it refused.

So there would be fresh agitation waiting her in that home where she was so longing to go for rest and comfort.

But it did not make her wish to delay her return. It would, she felt, now be best to get back ; and have the meeting over and done with, and the old calm, pure, monotonous life beginning for her once more.

Hirell did not see Robert after the night they brought him home till the day she left. Mrs. Chamberlayne thought it best that it should be so. On the afternoon when Robert had come to them on the lawn, and found them with red eyes, they had opened their hearts to each other about him. Mrs. Chamberlayne had told Hirell how long, and with

what patient hope, Robert had loved her, but she had also sadly accepted Hirell's passionate and despairing avowal of her love for the man whom she felt she could never consent to marry.

After that Mrs. Chamberlayne fully made up her mind that Hirell *would* sooner or later marry Sir John Cunliff. And when Robert lay ill, she jealously guarded him from one gleam of false hope. It would be so bitter to take it from him, if it grew into him with his new strength.

No one ever knew what suffering that one glimpse of Robert's white face had stamped on Hirell's heart ; or how for many days, as he lay between life and death, she was tormented by the horrible fear that he might never see his ripening harvest gathered in.

But Robert got better and began to regain his strength very soon, and as Mrs. Payne declared, "to eat like a wolf."

Three weeks had elapsed since his accident, when it was decided that Mr. Wrigley was to take Hirell home.

Mrs. Chamberlayne, who was now well enough to be carried every day into her son's

room, saw that Robert certainly would not be content without Hirell's coming to bid him farewell. So when she was dressed for her journey, Hirell had to go and tap at the sick-room door; and was bidden to come in by Mrs. Chamberlayne, who was having a late breakfast at Robert's bed-side.

Hirell was determined not to disturb him by the sight of her own emotion. But when she saw him lying back on the bank of white pillows, his face almost as white, and thinner and darker under the eyes than in his school-boy days, she felt something swelling in her throat that made her afraid to speak, as she took his hand, and returned his smile of greeting. Her eyes were full of tears, which ran over when Robert said,

"They will all miss you sadly, Hirie."

That nearly made her burst out with passionate reproaches on herself, for ever having come and brought such misfortune upon them, but she controlled herself and only said,

"O, Robert, hush! Forgive me, but don't praise me, after all I have brought on you. Dear Robert, I cannot bear that!"

She sat down pressing her handkerchief to her eyes, and trying to grow calm.

"Will your father let me come down to Bod Elian, when I get out of Mrs. Payne's snuffy hands?" asked Robert; "I shall need mountain air then if ever any one did?"

"O yes, please, Robert, we shall all be so glad."

"Well, I shall certainly come. How strange, if I am kept here till just about the same time that I was down last year!"

At that moment Susan knocked at the door, and told them Mr. Wrigley said the time was up, and was the young lady ready?

Hirell rose hastily, once more shook hands with Robert, then knelt down by Mrs. Chamberlayne, and the two clung to each other like mother and daughter.

When Hirell rose and was moving towards the door, she stood still and looked round, and saw that Robert had turned his face upon his arm. The morning sunshine was on his hand that used to be so brown, that now was white and thin. Her eyes followed the sunshine from it to the rich fields without, and a thrill went through her as she thought, what

if that hand should never again be busy there with sickle or seed.

Mrs. Chamberlayne looked at her as if she would bid her to go without taking more notice of the invalid, but Hirell with an air of gentle defiance stood still a moment, then walked back to the bed-side with something of the old sweet saintly gravity.

“May the Lord bless you and restore you, Robert ;” she said solemnly, and kissed him.

She spoke the prayer while her lips were touching his forehead, so that the kiss was most holy, the prayer most sweet.

CHAPTER XVII.

KEZIA.

MR. WRIGLEY considered his time of far too much importance for him to think of staying an hour in Wales. Indeed he returned to Dolgarrog by the car in which he took Hirell up to Bod Elian.

Only Kezia was at home, Elias having gone to a cattle fair at Aber.

She was standing outside the kitchen door by the churn when Hirell came behind her. She had just left off her work to rest her arms, and was looking along the Aber road visible from here for many miles.

"Kezia!" said Hirell, then burst out with a wild peal of laughter as Kezia started, and turned towards her. Kezia laughed a little, and cried a little, all in a tranquil way, very different from Hirell's. And then they went

in and sat down, holding one another's hands by turns—asking and answering questions, and falling into fits of tearful or smiling silence.

“And father's well, Kezia—you're quite sure?”

“Yes, thank the Lord, he is well in health.”

“But is he very much troubled about things—about money, Kezia?”

“No, he says his affairs are coming more under his control.”

“Kezia, did he use Robert's money?”

“Oh dear, no! I never dared tell him. I sent it back to Robert, because the other money could be got. But, somehow, your father did not think it all right; so he has not used any of it, but he will tell you what he thinks of it.”

“Kezia, it's not about *his* coming, is it, that father's troubled?”

“O no; he thinks that right and natural. You know he wrote to Sir John Cunliff yesterday, telling him you were coming home to-day.”

“Did he?” said Hirell, starting up, then sitting down again, and turning pale :—“then

he may be here any day—any minute,” she added with a shiver.

“Did your father tell you when he wrote,” asked Kezia, “that Mr. Rhys had sent here to know whether Sir John was coming back, and if so, when we expected him?”

“No.”

“Then you don’t know that they are back at Dola’ Hudol, and that Mrs. Rhys is seriously ill?”

“No, indeed.”

“There has been a deal of talk about them since you’ve been away.”

Hirell looked at her with keen searching eyes.

That strange tragic little episode in the orchard last year had never quite left her mind; now it seemed to grow more vivid in it.

“Talk, Kezia,” she said, “what kind of talk?”

“Sir John Cunliff is mixed up with it, Hirell. I should not tell you, but I think you might hear it directly in some extravagant way.”

"How is he mixed up in it, Kezia? Tell me all. You are right—I ought to know."

"O Hirell, they say Sir John Cunliff has broken her heart. They say they cared for each other too much, and when Mr. Rhys was away, kept meeting instead of avoiding each other. She led a wretched life when she came back here, through Mr. Rhys knowing about it; and now, though it's said he's forgiven her, and they are quite reconciled, her heart seems broken, and they say she's dying. But Hirell, *bach*; don't look so."

"Go on, Kezia; is it known why they want *him*?"

"No; who can say? Hirell, Hirell! my sweet dear."

Kezia put her arm round the poor drooping form, and drew it to the open door for air, and seating it there, fetched some water, which the white faint lips sipped gratefully.

After a long silence, Hirell roused herself, and said—

"Let us say no more about this, Kezia. Come, I'm longing to know all the news—*our* news—which, however sad and miserable, is never, never worse, never disgraceful. I think

you mean father is troubled about something, if it isn't about money."

There was a silence again, during which Kezia's light eye-lashes grew wet.

"Dear Hirell, you know how Hugh left us. Your father has felt it very deeply."

Another silence, and soon Kezia lays her hand on Hirell's, and says with a faint blush—

"I haven't thanked you yet, Hirell, for the dear note you wrote me after you had heard from Hugh."

"And, Kezia, you haven't told me anything yet that you know I am longing [to hear."

"I'm afraid I have very, very little to tell you, dear."

"But, Kezia, has nothing come, then, of those letters that Hugh told me he had left—one for you and one for father?"

Kezia shook her head, and smiled a sweet patient smile.

"Did Hugh tell you what he told me about—about father?" asked Hirell.

"Yes."

"Kezia!" Hirell knelt down before her,

and took hold of her arms, and looked searchingly into her timid serious blue eyes ; “ tell me the truth, dear Kezia, do you after all care more for Hugh than father ? ”

The eyes looked back at her wonderingly, the head shook gently but emphatically.

“ Then you do love father, Kezia ? Dearly ? ”

The fair puritan-looking little head wavered a moment, then fell forwards on Hirell’s shoulder.

“ O Hirell ! your mother joined our hands. She often often told me how she dreaded leaving him—he was so stern to himself, she said, so severe and self-sacrificing, he needed some one to be always guarding him from himself. We had always been such friends—ever since I was a child. In her last moments, Hirell, she joined our hands, and asked him to let me take her place. I have her written words about it ; I will show it you, and her own wedding ring. Well, dear Hirell, I thought—before Hugh wrote that letter—I thought I had never found favour in your father’s sight ; but though I thought so, I felt, dear, I’d rather be his servant all my days than another’s wife.”

"But now, Kezia, that you know the truth?"

Kezia raised her head, and looked at Hirell with a gentle pride.

"And now that I know the truth, Hirell, what can *I* do?"

Then Hirell understood it all. Hugh had been able to tell Kezia Elias' secret, but of Kezia's he had known nothing. Therefore Elias knew nothing of it either. Hirell understood in a moment why her father had not been able to speak. She knew his nature well enough to be sure of how he would doubt the possibility of Kezia's loving him.

She said nothing more, but kissed Kezia and went up stairs.

Kezia was the first to see Elias coming home, and she called Hirell to go and meet him.

She remained in the kitchen herself busily preparing supper.

Instead of coming in, Elias and Hirell when they reached the house remained, to Kezia's surprise, walking up and down in front of it.

At last they came in together, and Hirell took her father to his old seat. Kezia was busy at the fire warming buttermilk, to pour on the oatcake she had been breaking into the basins on the supper table.

To her amazement Hirell took hold of her hand, and drawing her to Elias put it into his hand, saying—

“Father, why don’t you give me the mother that my own mother left me?”

And then she went out and left them alone.

It was not long before Elias opened the door and called—

“Hirell, my daughter, where are you?”

And when she came, he pointed with both his hands to Kezia as she stood with her head bent down weeping for joy, and said—

“See then — your mother. I go to give thanks where thanks are due.”

The evening was a very quiet and peaceful one. They talked chiefly of the great meeting there was to be at the opening of the chapel next month. Hirell had to hear how

it had been arranged, that there should be a great gathering of the English miners, on Moel Mawr; and how they were to be addressed by the Reverend Ephraim Jones and other gifted friends.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AN ARRIVAL AT BOD ELIAN.

A FORTNIGHT had passed since Hirell's return home, and yet Sir John had not made his appearance. His delay was, however, fully accounted for by the newspapers, which showed how importantly he was occupied—and which officious neighbours took care to bring or send in to the Morgans, although it was generally believed they had little reason to be pleased with him.

The Reverend Ephraim Jones, with whom Hugh now lodged, sent Elias several very favourable reports of him—though he owned himself he began to fear that his work at Messrs. Tidman's, to whose house he had been re-admitted, was too hard for him, too exhausting, the minister owned—both to the spirit and the flesh.

A few days afterward they had a letter from Hugh himself, in which he told them how to his astonishment, and for the moment to his shame and humiliation, Sir John Cunliff had appeared one day at Tidman's, introduced himself to those gentlemen as a friend of Hugh's family, and begged to be permitted to take him away for a few hours, a request that was granted with a marked sense of the honour done in making it. Hugh said he could scarcely help laughing at the change that in an instant came over his employers' attitude towards him, as they looked at him and at the card on the table before them, bearing the words—"Sir John Cunliff, Bart., Werge Castle."

Hugh told them he had spent a delightful day, and that his future prospects had been discussed as kindly by Sir John as if he had been his dearest friend for many years. When things were more settled, Hugh said he would tell them what Sir John had proposed to him.

It wanted three days to the first of the great prayer meetings, and Hirell and Kezia were sitting in the afternoon knitting near

the open door, and practising the hymns in which they were to take the lead on the grand day, when they heard the sound of wheels coming sharply round the field road.

They were unmistakably the wheels of a Dolgarrog car.

Hirell and Kezia both rose hastily, and went into the house.

"It is him at last," said Hirell. "O Kezia, I wish father was at home."

She had turned so pale and trembled so, Kezia thought her quite unfit to meet the visitor, and drew her gently into her father's room.

Then Kezia went herself to receive Sir John, as she had no doubt whatever the guest would prove to be.

Hirell heard her in another minute returning, a manly step accompanying hers.

Surely she would not bring him here, Hirell thought, rising and holding fast the edge of the open bureau.

The door opened—Kezia appeared, beaming—and behind her came Robert Chamberlayne.

Was it intense relief or bitter disappoint-

ment? Kezia wondered, that made Hirell burst into tears, and sob so violently that it was several minutes before she could quiet her.

Robert stood looking very serious and astonished.

"There," said Kezia, when she had got her a little quiet, "now see how well Master Robert is looking; I shouldn't have guessed he had been ill at all if I hadn't known all about it; No, indeed!"

"Robert!" said Hirell, smiling through her tears, and holding out her hand, "I couldn't help it—I think I never was so startled."

"What, did you take me for my own ghost, Hirell?" asked Robert.

"I thought—I was afraid—you were to be as I left you a long time—much longer than this. And you came in looking as well as if nothing had happened. It is no wonder I was startled, Robert. When one has got used to everything being quite changed, it does startle one to see anybody looking so exactly the same as ever, as you did when you came in. I am very glad, more glad than I can say, Robert, to see you so."

This speech was a great deal more sweet to Robert than Hirell had intended to make it. It made him happier than she had any idea of ; and enabled him to talk to her with less restraint than there had been between them for a very long while.

She was greatly interested in all the Ny-timber gossip that he brought, and felt as if it came from a place in which many years of her life had been spent.

Elias welcomed Robert a great deal more warmly than he had taken leave of him when he had last left Bod Elian ; and even smiled slightly several times, during supper, at Robert's accounts of Mr. Wrigley's blunders with his new machines.

It was not till just before prayers that Kezia told him of the visit they were daily expecting, and then all his happiness seemed gone, like a dream, and he could not tell how it had taken possession of him. He had known, he told himself—he had known, ever since Hirell came to Kent, that she would marry Cunliff at last, whatever happened to make him think otherwise.

The next day was Friday, and Robert

spent it with his old tutor at the Abbey Farm. He went to church in the evening, and saw Mr. Rhys alone in the Dola' Hudol pew—looking so much older and less strong than in old days, that Robert scarcely at first knew him.

He got back to Bod Elian too soon to evade the ministers who had been there to arrange with Elias certain matters connected with the next Sunday's meeting. When he saw Elias taking leave of some one at the door, in the twilight, Robert's heart grew cold and heavy. It must be Cunliff. He had been then. All was settled ; and how ?

When he went in, after watching the retreating figure in the dusk, he thought he had never heard such music as the voice of Elias, when it said to him rather reproachfully—

“I would you had come a minute sooner, Robert Chamberlayne, that you might have met our gifted young friend, the Reverend Griffith Griffiths, who has but just now left us.”

Robert was so greatly relieved that he was able to express quite a lively regret at having

lost the chance of making the young minister's acquaintance.

The evening was concluded by the usual prayers, and an additional one for a blessing on the great undertakings of to-morrow.

CHAPTER XIX.

HIRELL'S CALL.

ALL at Bod Elian were stirring early on the morning of the great day.

Robert was out in time to help Hirell with her little farm yard duties, as, indeed, he had been every morning since his arrival, making Hirell half pleased, half vexed.

On that Sunday she had risen earlier, on purpose to avoid him ; and when she saw him sitting on the kennel, playing with the dogs, and waiting for her, she returned his "good morning," with a something so like a frown that it perplexed Robert ; and made him steal an uneasy, enquiring glance at her, which Hirell returned with a very bright, impatient, almost angry one, and they went to their work in silence—Hirell finishing nearly everything Robert tried to do.

One of the cows was ill, and Hirell had to see it take something her father had prepared for it. While they were waiting, Robert ventured a word of advice, but Hirell instead of answering, pulled her hymn book out of her pocket, and began studying it.

"Well," said Robert, losing patience, "if I'm not wanted, I'd better go."

"Do, Robert," answered Hirell, almost sadly, "and be ashamed of me as I am of myself. You thought better of me, I thought better of myself, than that I should hate you seeing all our wretched little contrivances and meannesses, because I've seen how different your place is. I ought not to feel it—I ought not to mind you seeing me do things that you set your plough-boys to do. Go in to breakfast, Robert, and don't be hurt—I'll pray to-day for my pride to be broken, and a better spirit given me, so that I can bear to have a fine gentleman opening and shutting doors and lifting pails for me, and bear to know he's thinking—'and she expected to be Lady Cunliff.' There, go along, Robert, I know you are going to say something kind, but I won't hear it. I'm wicked, but I'm not

a child—I won't be petted out of my wickedness—I'll get rid of it ; I'll humble my spirit to-day by taking to myself the harshest condemnations that Ephraim Jones hurls at the miners."

Smiling with tears in her eyes, she pushed him gently out of the shed, then shut herself in.

Robert, after a moment's hesitation and perplexity, went in, and as usual told his troubles to Kezia, who took his assistance at the same time, gratefully enough.

At breakfast a minister came in hot haste with a letter which he had received from the Reverend Ephraim Jones, who sent word to say that he should not be able to get to Capel Illtyd in time to address his dear brethren there after the morning service, as he had intended. He gave up his task, he said, to no one save Elias Morgan, the founder of the chapel himself ; whom he solemnly commanded to take his place, and not to heed the promptings of Satan to shrink from his duty, but to speak out of the fulness of the truth within him.

Elias was much disturbed by the unlooked-

for summons, and retired to ask Divine aid and countenance for such a task.

He returned in a little while, looking calmer and resigned, but anxious.

"I am willing to undertake the trust which is given so suddenly into my hands," he said to the young minister, "but I have a weakness to contend with, which our reverend friend has overlooked. I know not how to express myself freely in the English language."

This was a fact which no one present could doubt. Though Elias spoke English correctly, it was in a slow and rather stilted manner, that must spoil any eloquence he might be inspired with, while taking Ephraim Jones's place.

Hirell had been thinking of it ever since the minister's message had been delivered, and wondering how the difficulty was to be met, for she knew that by far the greater part of the open-air meeting after the service consisted of English and Irish miners.

"Could you, friend Evans, render my words into English as I go on, if I preach in my own tongue?" enquired Elias.

The young minister looked very dubious,

and said he did not think it would do—no, he did not at all think it would do.

Hirell felt greatly relieved when she heard brother Evans refuse the task, for she knew it was quite impossible he could do justice to her father's thoughts. He was an amiable, industrious young man, yet he had by no means a strong or original mind ; but was, as Ephraim Jones had once described him, "one of the many who stood forth to smite Satan, but could never do more than tickle him."

"Could the gifted Griffith Griffiths?" Elias asked.

No. Brother Evans knew he had to hurry away directly after the service, as he was to preach at Aber in the afternoon. Besides, brother Evans thought it decidedly would *not* do ; nobody could translate quick enough.

As Elias looked along the table, from one face to another, his eye fell suddenly on what appeared to him a message from Heaven, that put an end to all his difficulty. It was Hirell's face looking towards him full of light, and wistful solemn enquiry. He knew it said to him—

"Father, shall *I* do?" and he answered instantly aloud, and with glad emotion—

"Hirell, beam of light indeed, your call has come! this work is yours—no other's. Be at peace, brother Evans, the multitude shall be spoken to in two tongues at once."

When Hirell rose with changing colour and trembling hands from her place, Robert, who had not been able to understand the whole of what had passed, the minister and Elias having spoken in Welsh, began to suspect something of the truth, and asked Kezia what it was. When she told him, he turned quickly to Elias, exclaiming—

"No no, surely, Morgan, you would never let her do that."

Elias looked at him with calm contempt.

"If you choose to come with us, Robert Chamberlayne," he said, "it may be you will be glad the mission has been sent to her. Come, Hirell. We will go and pray together. Brother Evans, your time is precious—we will not keep you."

"I should never have believed it of Elias," cried Robert, walking about indignantly, when

he was alone with Kezia. "It wouldn't matter so much for any other woman—but Hirell! Hirell to be stared at and talked over by hundreds of tipsy miners."

"Ah, Master Robert, leave it to Elias," said Kezia soothingly. "He knows what is best. He has wonderful lights; and ah, dear Hirell! it will be a sight to see her giving out her father's sayings, and crowds and crowds looking at her. I always said she was one of the holy women, such as the blessed Paul loved and sent greetings to by Phebe, and now I must get my bonnet on, and be all ready to help the dear child."

CHAPTER XX.

AT THE MARTYR'S OAK.

THEY went out together, Hirell walking with her father, Robert with Kezia.

Hirell had since "her call" changed her dress for a very old black one of Kezia's, and wore black gloves and bonnet.

"Is this part of the humiliation of the day, Hirell?" whispered Robert, touching her sleeve as she waited with him and Kezia, while her father was talking to a group of friends just arrived from Dolgarrog.

She looked down at her rusty dress and answered—

"No, Robert, this is not humility, this again is pride."

"How's that?"

"Don't you see that, as the bearer of good tidings, it would better become me to put on

cheerful colours, to remember myself only as the Lord's servant, doing His will, and forget myself *as* myself, timid and startled by the gaze of many eyes. But I cannot do this, Robert, so I've put on black, that I shan't be much noticed as I stand with father and the others, who'll all be in black too."

As they approached the simple, grey little chapel which Robert remembered so well in its unfinished state, they saw already a large number of miners in straggling groups on the Aber road.

The chapel stood on a mound towards the centre of the stony field that sloped towards Bod Elian.

The morning was warm and sunny, the ascent difficult, and those who came from great distances sat down on the broken walls and heaps of stones, wiping their faces, and waiting for the chapel doors to open.

When they were open, Elias, Hirell, Robert and Kezia were respectfully made way for; but no sooner had they gone in, and sat side by side on the first long seat, which was for the special use of Elias and his household, than the push and tumult for places began.

In an almost incredibly short time the little building was filled.

After this there was still a noise and confusion at the door, and several English jeers and jests about the smallness of the chapel reached Robert's ears, and made him feel more and more irritated at the thought of Hirell addressing such a rabble.

Without waiting for the confusion to stop, the Reverend Griffith Griffiths began the service, and before many minutes those close outside the door, either from curiosity or from despair of distracting the attention of the congregation, became very quiet, though the vast and still increasing number outside and around the chapel made a strange, buzzing, uneven sort of murmur.

Hirell's heart beat fast as she heard it, and thought how soon the service would be over, and her novel and formidable task begin.

At last she knew the time had come. The Reverend Griffith Griffiths was shaking hands with her father, and a cry was raised outside the door of—

“They are coming out—make way, they are coming out.”

There was a noise, as of eager feet, a great movement and bustle within, and soon Hirell found herself out in the strong noon-day sun, her hand held firmly in her father's.

She heard her father give the order that the crowd should draw together, and proceed to the Martyr's Oak higher up the valley, singing as they went a hymn which he gave out, and which he led himself.

The Martyr's Oak was the only tree to be seen from the chapel. It was of great size and age, and held in extreme veneration far and near. Under its branches, said tradition, in the days of Laud and Whitgift the persecuted flock of Christ had come here to worship ; and, at times, in the dead of night, when the search was too hot for them to meet in the light of day ; and on one occasion a young minister had been captured, and hung upon its branches.

There the people spread themselves out in a kind of half-circle. Many in the front sat down, till row after row was formed, so as to admit those standing behind to share in the expected feast.

Just in front of the broad trunk of the oak

rose a short stunted stem, as if some other and younger tree had grown there and been cut down to make a pillar on which a man might stand ; and that, with its overshadowing and waving canopy, was the Martyr's Oak.

Elias declined at first to mount to so conspicuous a position, but waving his hand for silence, began to explain that he and his friend had experienced a great disappointment in the absence of the Reverend Ephraim Jones, who had promised to be with them. But God, he said, was no respecter of persons ; and had prompted him, Elias Morgan, their humble friend and neighbour, to determine to address them to the best of his ability.

He did this first in Welsh, then in English ; and then, also in both languages, explained to them that as it was difficult to him to think in English, and as also there were many there who would not understand him if he used that tongue, his daughter, an earnest child of God, reared from infancy in the one true faith, would endeavour to lift up her voice and translate for them into English what he spoke in Welsh.

Hirell trembled as some English cheers—some mocking, but mostly earnest—were raised as her father ceased speaking. She saw, too, a decided swaying of the crowd, a vehement pushing forward, and heard a few loud English remarks on her appearance, and invitations to stand up on the tree and show herself. She saw Robert standing alone, for he had been deserted by Kezia, who had told him, to his amusement and contempt, that the men and women must separate on leaving the chapel. Hirell saw him standing looking towards her with eyes full of tender vexation.

Her cheeks were very hot—the crowds of familiar and strange faces swam before her eyes. As she tried to look steadily around her, she suddenly laid her other hand on her father's, and pressed closer to him.

He looked down at her, and met her eyes looking up at him full of tears, and passionate entreaty.

"What is it, my child?" he whispered in Welsh.

"Pray, pray let me go. I cannot speak. *He* is there, father, I saw him."

"Sir John Cunliff?"

“Yes.”

Elias gave one stern hurried glance in the direction the little fluttering hand on his seemed to indicate, and there he saw indeed Sir John Cunliff, looking wonderfully like “Mr. Rymer,” in his tourist dress.

He did not hesitate a moment after looking at him, and round upon the crowd.

“Hirell,” he said, sternly, “the welfare of all these children of the Almighty Father assembled here, must be more regarded by me than the suffering of my own one child. You must not shrink—you shall not—send forth your voice and trust to Him to make it heard. Now follow me instantly.”

And he cried in a loud voice,—

“Gweddiwn.”

Immediately a piercing, plaintive tone followed like an echo with the English,

“Let us pray.”

And throughout all the long prayer it never failed, but like a silver bell struck by the same hand that had just sent the deep sonorous sound from one of iron, rang out clearly, thrillingly and sweetly.

At first the fair young face, with auburn

hair pushed back under the black bonnet, and sweet eyes clouded and wandering as if they saw nothing, provoked much rude staring and admiration ; but before many minutes the short sentences thrown out by that grand sonorous bass and sweet treble of repetition, began to strike home in many a wild, wicked, and miserable nature, till the air grew more and more silent and clear for the passage of the two voices.

At last the attention of the crowd became rapt and unbroken ; smoking, nut cracking, orange eating, orange peel throwing, everything seemed forgotten, but the grand crowding mountain of heads, and God's double-voiced messenger, who spoke as with the mouth of archangel and seraph.

A time had been when Hirell would have looked and acted very differently under such circumstances, and several who listened to her and watched her now knew it. Once, and only a little year ago, she would have spoken to those crowds of men in a way only to make them stare and wonder and forget. Strong in her own purity, and in the purity of all she loved, she would have stood before

them coldly radiant, like some angel immeasurably separated from them and their sorrows and their sins and their despairings by her own ignorance of pain, her own calm, cold innocence, and her own unquestioning certainty of her salvation.

But now the pride of her supposed saint-hood was gone from her. She no longer looked proudly, as if conscious of its crown, no longer stood proudly as if its spotless robes were on her limbs. In spite of her father's words, which she repeated, her voice and eyes and gestures were full of a passionate humility, which seemed to bid all souls to fall with hers, and own His laws beyond all understanding, and implore the mercy none might hope to deserve.

Elias also had undergone some of this change. The past year had tended to break down his spiritual pride as well as Hirell's. They both were conscious of it—both felt it as a token of divine displeasure, and bowed under it with a meekness and humility that to other eyes than their own became as a crowning glory to their simple and pure natures.

Sir John Cunliff dimly perceived something of this. He noticed, too, how strange and mysterious a sympathy there was between the truly good and the utterly wicked. There was a frightfully depraved looking fellow near him—ugly with mental and physical deformity—he had been jeering at Hirell longer than any of the others, but had been quiet now for some time, and Sir John noticed that he and many—more or less like him—became most moved by the very sentences which most strongly affected Hirell, while the self-righteous and respectable part of the crowd remained scarcely touched. Perhaps the bond between them was the sense of the immeasurable distance of Him to whom they prayed.

“Poor publican,” thought Sir John, as he saw the heavy disgusting-looking eyes near him blink, and look down, at sentences that made Hirell’s weep. “How comes it that you are nearer to the angels than to the Pharisees?”

The “poor publican,” who was in truth a poor navvy, emitted something between a groan and an oath, that Sir John trusted might be taken in Heaven as an “Amen,”

when Elias concluded his closing prayer with these words — which Hirell repeated in English with a pathos and yearning indescribable —

“My God, my God, let it not be that I have forgotten thee too long ever to find thee again !

“Let me not go a stranger into the land of death, or the worm find its way to my heart before my spirit hath come unto thee !”

A cry of exultation from the Welsh broke the silence following the prayer. There was a new comer seen, recognised as the Reverend Ephraim Jones.

Elias and he met very near to where Sir John Cunliff had moved, making convenient use of the oak tree's trunk, or descending limbs, for the shelter he needed from time to time, while only seeming to be one of the scattered crowd that clung closely to the vicinity of the pulpit.

The minister was hard-breathed with the hurry of his walk, and in a most profuse sweat, and it was as much as he could do to let out a few words of explanation, while

wiping his face, opening out his coat, and throwing back his waistcoat to seek air and coolness.

“Friend Elias, thou dost make me rejoice greatly, yea, and thank God even for my great trouble—this breach of a solemn engagement—when I see and hear of all thy doings in the Lord. And thou also, Hirell Morgan, ‘Blessed art thou among women!’ Would I had myself been a listener! But all in good time I shall hear thee—God willing.”

If a blush ever was detected on Elias’s face, it was then. He valued greatly his friend’s ability, and judgment, and was troubled to feel how sweet to him was this appreciation of faith.

He ought, perhaps, to repel the honour to himself, but his old delicacy of perception forbade, lest he might seem to be reproving his chief.

The two men stepped a little aside from the crowd, and so came still nearer to Cunliff, who could only evade them by turning his back.

Suddenly, to his extreme annoyance, he

caught the Rev. Ephraim Jones's eye full and stern upon him.

Cunliff turned at once full face, and lifted his hat.

Elias's attention was now caught, and he, too, saw Sir John, and received his salutation. Before these two could speak, or determine whether they should speak to each other at that moment, the minister plucked his friend by the sleeve, and said something in a low tone, which Cunliff only partially heard, but which was enough to send the blood in a rush to his cheek. The words he heard were these :—

“As I expected, friend Elias, a mere juggle! An imposition for what purposes he best knows—though thou too mayest guess.”

Then with some difficulty the minister reduced his voice to a whisper, a tone he neither loved nor was accustomed to, and Cunliff could hear no more, except the phrase “spoiling the Egyptians,” which seemed to be uttered by the minister with great unction, and produced a grim smile on Elias's face.

But he saw them glance at him, and felt

certain his trick about the five hundred pounds had been discovered.

"Well, what could they make of it?" he thought defiantly, but felt horribly annoyed.

The two men moved away, as if to evade him.

Presently he saw a considerable portion of the congregation gathering once more together about the Martyr's Oak, and lo! on the pillar or pulpit, stood the big, unlovely, but not unmajestic figure of the Rev. Ephraim Jones.

"Friends and brethren," he said in a voice of portentous strength, "it is not my purpose to-day to weaken by diluting the admirable address that I hear friend Morgan has given you. I shall have another opportunity to talk to you, but I should like to give you yet something more to carry home before you go. Have you not had to-day joyful tidings respecting God? I know you have. I hope your hearts are full with it; but you must make room there for yet one crumb of comfort more relating to God's house—yonder chapel!

"It is not for me to tell you its history; you know it even better than I do. Are

there not among you many who poor as the scripture widow herself, have given their mites in and for it? Are there not among you men, who after toiling the whole day for bread for their families, have come here into the dark night and toiled to make a place where yet another kind of bread should be always found? But I am not here to praise you, I have little gift that way. I want to tell you how God has raised up for us in his own manner,—do you hear me? in his own manner, which is often not our manner—succour sufficient to finish the good work. All its debt will now be paid off; friend Elias will have the millstone taken from his neck, nor that only, for I have the satisfaction to inform you that there will be left after its entire completion, enough money to form a permanent fund for its repair.”

He was interrupted by the usual Welsh hum of approbation, then by cheers which the English understood better than hums, and then by cries of—

“How? how? how?”

“Five hundred pounds have been sent anonymously—ah, brethren, how sweet charity

can exhibit itself!—to our friend Elias Morgan; who knowing no other just or manly purpose for which it could be sent, accepts on my advice, the idea that it is for our chapel! hurrah!”

The minister perhaps forgot himself when he waved his hat, and gave that loud hurrah, which set off the whole body of listeners; or perhaps he thought he had a right for once to forget ministerial formalism in sheer enjoyment of the punishment he inflicted.

“Name! name! name!”

“Don’t give it; there’s enough done,” said Elias in a low but earnest tone, as he saw Hirell pale as death, and felt her trembling hand resting on his arm for support.

“Not give it!” said the minister looking grandly round, while there was a rich twinkle of light in his eye: “Not give it! I would not omit it for the world. Does not our benefactor deserve the gratitude of his fellow men? At least,” and here suddenly he changed his tone, “do we not know he ought? Brethren, put up your prayer this night for our benefactor, Sir John Cunliff, Baronet; and pray as heartily as I do, that

whatever he may need in this life, or in the life to come, will be vouchsafed him in measure as abundant as his practical generosity to us. Sir John Cunliff, Baronet. Amen."

There was a pause, and Cunliff breathed again as he found there was no intention to make known his own presence.

But he was furious, and moved about uneasily for a few seconds, wondering whether or no he ought and dared to disclaim the gift and the honour.

No, he saw that was too dangerous; he was tied hand and foot by the past, a helpless captive of the bow and spear of the Reverend Ephraim.

They advanced.

"You are pleased to make merry with me, gentlemen!" he said.

"Why not, sir? The Lord loves a cheerful giver; he can hardly be wroth with one who also receives cheerfully," was the minister's response.

"Mr. Morgan," said Cunliff, "will you favour me with a few minutes' conversation?"

"May I first ask, Sir John, if this visit is an accidental one?"

"No. I come now from London expressly to see you."

"Then you are welcome to Bod Elian, Sir John Cunliff. We are ready to turn homeward with you now. Hirell!"

She was standing still by the oak with Kezia and some other women, who had come about her, praising her, some to her comfort and pleasure, some to her humiliation and annoyance. But during that last minute or two, she had had but scant attention to give to any of their praises.

When her father called her, she turned a little paler, set her lips close, and with a quick imploring look at Kezia, glided to him and stood at his side, acknowledging and stopping Sir John's eager advance towards her by a slight bend of the head.

"Hirell," said her father, "go home with Kezia, and prepare to welcome Sir John Cunliff with what hospitality is within our power."

They hurried on in advance of Sir John and Elias, who followed.

Without either mentioning his name, both looked round for Robert, and saw that he had disappeared.

He had waited till he was certain as to whether Sir John was going to be permitted to enter Bod Elian, and then took himself off to the Abbey farm, to wait there till the visitor should be gone. He had no wish to receive Sir John's thanks, or to let him see by his behaviour how little he cared about his gratitude. So he thought it on the whole wisest to be absent.

He felt there was a time now come for him, that however long, or however brief, would contain the most bitter moments of suspense he had ever known.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE BITTER CUP.

HIRELL had no time to think of changing her dusty black dress or to bathe her eyes that ached with the strong sun which had shone before them so blindingly at the Martyr's Oak.

She could not even obey her father in helping Kezia to prepare some refreshment for Sir John. Directly she got into the house she went straight to her father's room and sat down between the bureau and the window—very still—so still, that Kezia, coming anxiously from her preparations, to look at her, thought she had fainted. But when she called to her and touched her, Hirell looked up with a sweet, wild kind of smile, and taking Kezia's hand, locked it tightly in both her own, then put it from her, saying—

heart's best wishes for your good. I can take nothing from you but *your* forgiveness and good wishes, which I ask for, Sir John."

He looked at her with eyes full of passionate, tender incredulity. He said to himself that it could not be there was such cruel strength of purpose in such a fair, childish face—more childish now, strange to say, in its thinness and delicacy than he had ever seen it. Was Elias, after all, untruthful in telling him no one had tried to influence her against him? He thought of her early love and its utter guilelessness and humility, and felt it was impossible she could mean indeed to refuse him.

He did not answer very soon, and his silence affected Hirell far more than any words could have done. Though her eyes were still tearless and her lips closed firmly, he saw her fingers fluttering nervously near her slender, swelling throat, as if there were rising in it words or cries she would fain repress.

"O Hirell," he cried, suddenly kneeling by the table where she sat, and laying his hand on her wrist, "You haven't quite ceased to love me, have you?"

She was startled—startled into tears, but not out of her coldness.

“I have ceased to love you well enough to become your wife,” she answered, in a very low, firm voice.

“No, no,” cried Cunliff, “give me what little love you have left, Hirell, I will be content ; I will make it more. You have pledged yourself to me—you have *your* pledge to remember, whatever I have done. Can you dare to break your solemn promise to be true to me ?”

At this a little strange gleam of fire came into the wet eyes.

“I gave my solemn promise to be true to Mr. Rymer—I was true to him, to the last,—but, Sir John Cunliff, from the first minute *you* were made known to me, I felt—I felt the one that I had loved before was gone. *You* were left, but you were not the one that I had loved—I do not wish to love you. I do not understand you—I will certainly never marry you ; I am not fit for you, nor you for me. You saw it all so truly, if you would but remember.”

He stood regarding her in bitter silence.

Those words "you saw it all so truly if you would but remember," were as gall to him; and it was as if the cruel light they threw upon his heart's secrets was reflected back on Hirell's, for he suddenly saw, or thought he did, the one taint of her nature.

"Hirell," he said, in a voice such as she had never heard from him before, "you are not so perfect as you think, after all your anger against me. Your suffering, which keeps alive your anger, is all not because I sinned against your womanhood, but because I sinned against your sainthood; and you cannot bring back the old glory and halo, the *sense* of unapproachable light and goodness of which you were so proud."

Her eyes, fixed on the table before her, were filled with anguish; he saw that he had indeed stung her—but, when she spoke, he knew the sting had only made her heart close up from him the more.

"Perhaps you are right, Sir John Cunliff;" she said, "perhaps I am guilty of the thing you say, but if so I have never withdrawn myself from God's hands, and he knows what he is doing with me. I am sure too, that he

knows I ought to keep the one thing you *have* left to me—my faith in Him, and this I could not do if I married you.”

“Hirell, forgive me. How dared I say what I have said !”

“I have no doubt but that it was true—too true, Sir John.”

Again he stood, silent, in fierce self-reproach and suffering.

“Hirell, Hirell,” he cried suddenly, “this is too much ! It cannot be that I must drain this bitter, bitter, cup.”

“May God make it less bitter for you, sir, I cannot.”

He rose, and walked the length of the little room twice with head bent down, hands linking, and eyes looking helplessly round as in a vague search for hope.

At last his eyes resting on Hirell’s little bible as it lay by her black gloves and bonnet, he stood still a moment looking at it. Suddenly he went to the table, took up the little book, and came to her with it.

“Hirell, I cannot play the patient lover after this, and offer to live on hope when no hope seems to exist. I know you too well,

and I know I have already given you too much time for consideration for this to be any mere caprice, and yet I cannot—I cannot bring myself to believe, Hirell !”

She looked at him with cold, questioning eyes.

“Hirell, my darling! my only hope and love! you do not mean me to take your words for solemn truth—not for truth so solemn that you could swear it upon this book. You could not do that?—say you could not, and I will wait—and hope—and come to you again.”

She rose up, she put her hands upon the book as he held it, but though her lips opened and moved, she could not speak.

“No, Hirell, no,” he pleaded, shudderingly trying to draw away the book; but following his entreaty came the words, low, but clear and distinct—

“I swear upon this book that I will never marry Sir John Cunliff.”

His hands were slowly withdrawn, the Bible slipped from hers, and fell on to the floor.

Both knew that the vow, the first she had ever made, was irrevocable. Both knew, as she sank into her chair, and he knelt beside

her, that they were severed as utterly as two sailors on an iceberg, when it breaks, and they are being borne away on its different parts by different currents.

He scarcely seemed to feel her hands, or she his, as they were clasped in that last clasp. They seemed rather to be stretching them towards each other in the distance they felt spreading so fast between them.

And then the real parting came, and they saw each other no more.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE SOLITARY.

As a man stunned by a blow which deprives him of all sensation beyond a confused dull pain, which he does not even attempt to understand, will go blindly groping along, so that a bystander may not even guess his state, Sir John Cunliff, after carefully closing the door of Bod Elian behind him, descended the hill into the valley.

He stood for a minute or two on the Dolgarrog road, upon the long, old, stone bridge that crosses the valley, and leant over the parapet, as if studying the Roman pavement of the ancient ford below. But the head sank more and more, till it and the hand rested on and pressed closely to the cold stone.

A bird sang high in the air, and began to descend, singing deliciously as it did so. He

lifted his head, as if from old habit, to listen ; broke out into a passionate but unintelligible exclamation ; climbed over the wall of the bridge, and went on through the marshes, up to his knees in water occasionally (for the tide overflows here), nor did he stop till he reached the ferry.

The ferryman was on the other side, and Cunliff gazed as if in perfect helplessness towards him. Perhaps, the sound of his own voice, raised just then in a shout, would have been too horrible.

He waited in a dreadful calm till somebody should come. A tramp, with tracts in his hand, as a pretence for a vocation, was the first comer : he shouted lustily.

The boat and boatman soon crossed, and soon took them both over ; the tramp neither annoying Cunliff by looking at him, or by offering his wares, to the latter's great relief.

"Is the river deep?" asked the tramp.

"Deep enough to drown a man last week," replied the boatman, "who got in for a swim, and couldn't get out again."

"I wonder what he thinks of his luck, now?" said the half-jesting, half-sepulchral voice of

the gentleman-passenger ; but the boatman, looked as though he'd be glad when he'd got rid of such a reprobate ; and the tramp himself looked on in a spirit of grave reproof.

Cunliff, as he jumped out of the boat, threw them a shilling a-piece, and called out, with a laugh—

“ Even the devil, you see, is not so black as he's painted,” and passed away from their wondering eyes.

It was the solitude of the mountain that evidently tempted him. Criba Ban in all its majesty rose before him ; its highest peaks rising steeply up from where he stood ; while its mighty arms were prolonged far away, right and left for many miles in each direction.

He was mad enough to think he could ascend from this part. When, after some half-hour of vain effort, he saw he could not, he determined to ascend from the side opposite to Dolgarrog ; a place that just now he seemed bent to shun.

A tremendous sweep had to be made to accomplish this, but after two or three hours of exertion that would have been simply impossible had he been in his ordinary senses,

he found himself at the top of one of the minor crests that hang about the breast of Criba Ban.

He was now full two thousand feet above the valley. The afternoon was yet sufficiently light for him to see the glorious scenery. Never yet had he ascended to a place like this without a vivid sense and keen enjoyment of the beauty and sublimity thus made visible. Yet now, the moment he stood on a little level platform, which he seemed to know familiarly, he lay down, without casting even a single glance around.

He lay on the hard, bare rock—now with his face to it, now in his writhings, with his face to the sky, the eyes shut, and the teeth fixed, as if with a vice. He seemed above all things to dread that unpacking of the heart with words, of which Hamlet speaks.

Gradually the light decreased, and a thin white mist crept stealthily up. Had any friendly voice been near, it would have been raised in warning. To be on Criba Ban, or Snowdon, in a mist, is about the most promising condition in which a man can place himself, who would like to have the benefit of suicide without its responsibility.

Sir John may be acquitted of any such thoughts; he had found the solitude he yearned for, the one only thing that in all this world offered even a gleam of relief; and if the word luxury can be applied to any condition annexed to the bed of tortures on which he lay, that luxury was his—the luxury, the relief to be alone.

Still more dim grew the afternoon, but he saw it not, saw nothing, till a faint light began to twinkle out on the slope of the opposite hill. He saw that, and sprang to his feet as if an electric shock had passed through him.

It was Bod Elian, there was no other house there.

He stood as if turned to a pillar of stone, watching that light for some minutes. Did its radiance—the undefinable sense of comfort suggested by it—kindle the possibility of hope, of yet another effort to win Hirell before it should be too late?

Some mechanical impulse caused him to take out his watch, look at the time, knowing nothing, however, about it, and put the watch back. Then quite unconsciously he again

took it out, and did notice, though with some difficulty, through the increasing gloom, that it was near six, and then came the full remembrance of where he was, and of his danger if he remained.

Before he had stirred a dozen paces it was again all forgotten, and he threw himself on the rock so carelessly as to cut both his face and hands with the sharp prominences ; but he felt nothing of the hurt, but began to give way to the heaving, maddening chaos within, to the bitter loathing of himself, of his life, of the world, and of all created things that he felt.

Passages from Scripture, used by Elias, came from time to time athwart this seething, sweltering hell, into which he struggled not to look, but which would not be denied his countenance. When he had covered all over as with the black ash of ruined hopes, and strove only to be at rest in a blank torpor, there would be a sudden light, and roar, and he and all the fiends of hell seemed once more to be in company.

The growing darkness seemed to be as welcome as sleep to wayfarers in the

Arctic regions when suffering from intense cold, the sleep that foreruns death.

Is it with the cruel inconsistency that suffering forces upon us, that he cannot leave the place from whence he sees that far-off light gleaming, even while every particle of strength he possesses is given, and has been given for hours past, to the one effort that can alone save him from insanity—the effort to shut out the actual picture of Hirell from his sight, and to exclude every thought directly leading to her from his mind ?

The darkness is still thickening about him, the wind moaning and sobbing vehemently, so that he can see nothing distinctly in the valley below ; and at last, the light that he has watched as a drowning mariner on a raft at sea might watch a similar indication of the place where he yearns for his foot to rest, fades, fades, and disappears.

The sense of the extreme cold now strikes upon his senses for the first time, as though that poor light had been sufficient sun for him while it lasted.

He rises slowly, goes to the edge of the precipice to estimate better his way down.

Growing more conscious at every step, his footsteps begin to quicken. He understands perfectly his danger, he has often ascended, and alone, not simply to this height, but to the very loftiest peak of Criba Ban.

He sees that the gathering mist has already shrouded all the lower part of the mountain, but he also sees a certain spot on the way down, which once reached, he would be safe, even if moving through a deeper than Egyptian darkness afterwards. The way to that spot is fortunately also sufficiently clear at present, and may remain so to enable him to pass through its dangers, if he does not lose a moment. Once the mist covers that route, he sees it is death to go down; and probably for him, in his present state, worse than death to remain on the mountain through such a night.

The prospect of danger does him good, brings back some instinct of mental health, and best of all, gives him work that may shut out, at least for a few minutes, or perhaps more, the sense of his intolerable sufferings.

He moves carefully. Between him and the

goal to be reached are black tarns of soundless depth, sudden, precipitous descents, ridges, crossing which, under such circumstances, is apt to appear to the bewildered wanderer like walking along the edge of a gigantic knife; these, and a score of lesser but confusing obstacles he has to deal with.

The fast-rising wind increases the cold and the danger. The mist comes every now and then as if in dense patches; he is obliged at a certain point to pause for breath, and to take counsel with himself as to a choice of the routes that offer over a particularly dangerous chasm.

It was during that pause he heard something which induced him to prolong the pause, even though conscious life now might be a question of minutes, nay, even of seconds.

He heard it again, but half fancied it was the wind, and determined to heed it not, but go on.

Some inexplicable impulse of humanity however stopped him again to listen, and then he heard clearly a low wail come by him, borne on the wind.

Full of wonder as to the human being who

could be here at such an hour, and desirous to save time, he went back a few yards, and there saw a shadowy something, just a little denser than the enveloping mist, advancing towards him.

The wail came again, a piteous one, and very feeble. He had evidently been seen. What was he to do? A few minutes lost now might compromise him hopelessly. The thought of "hope" was sufficient. He went back.

The form suddenly disappeared. Cunliff stood transfixed with horror; he ran on, and found, what seemed to him at first sight, a heap of rags. Stooping, he touched it, and a groan came from beneath.

"What in the world is it?" he said aloud; then some of the rags were pushed aside, and a wizened, old, hatchet face looked up at him with cap-frills shaking round it, and toothless jaws moving as they uttered what appeared to him a jargon he had never heard before. Certainly, he thought if this were Welsh, it was very different from the Welsh they talked at Bod Elian. Suddenly the poor old soul stopped her incomprehensible complaint, and

said sharply, and with ineffable disgust and despair, in Welsh :—

“No English !”

“No English !” echoed Sir John, “I understand that. But what the devil are you doing here ?”

“No English !” again answered the old woman, with a piteous wail.

“Well, up with you,” he said, energetically speaking, though he knew she could not understand him, but feeling as if his words must make his signs more comprehensible to her. “Up with you,” and he tried to lift her.

He managed to get her to stand, then seeing that she had a bundle hanging by a string round her waist, he tried to take it from her.

“Come, away with this ; it’s as much as I can do to save you, you poor silly old creature, staying here till this time of night.”

She looked at him bewildered at first, as to what he wanted with her bundle, but when she understood by his tugging at it that he meant to take it from her, she pushed him off with her long, stiff knuckled hand, and hugged her bundle to her, shaking her head emphatically at him.

"Come, away with it, I say; why what the deuce is in it, you miserable creature?"

She understood by his touching it, and perhaps by the tone of his voice, his curiosity, and making her stiff, trembling, old limbs bob a curtsey, undid a corner of her bundle, and respectfully showed him it was full of sheep-wool.

"And you come up here for this?" he said; and she, seeing him look round again, understood him. She saw that the ever inquisitive Englishman—inquisitive even at such a time and place as this—desired to be informed as to where she got it from, and immediately picked some bits from a bush close to her, bits which the sheep had left clinging there. She also pointed to the east, then to the west, by which Sir John understood her to mean, she had been here at her work from sunrise till now.

"Well, come," he said, putting his arm round her, and half lifting her along.

He looked for the goal of safety. It had passed out of sight.

Still, he reflected, the light might be sufficient for the way to be traced step by step, if only they could but go faster.

The poor old woman strained her little powers to the utmost to keep up with the gentleman, but her pace slackened, rather than increased, her weight to him grew more serious every minute.

He began to think this was only risking both lives. Had he not better lay her down in some sheltered corner, then go at his greatest possible speed to Dolgarrog, and send off ample assistance? How exquisitely ridiculous to good society would seem the fate of Sir John Cunliff, when reported as perishing in attempting to save a wretched old woman, whose wits, like his own, had gone wool-gathering on Criba Ban!

The person in question saved him all further trouble about this problem; she suddenly slid to the ground, moaning with the pain of her sprained foot, mutely refusing, with all the obstinacy of age, to move any further.

Fortunate chance! But Sir John Cunliff seems no longer himself, is evidently losing his self-possession, and growing childish. Somehow, this poor, exhausted life has swelled to him into something of value, something that he cannot afford to lose, some-

thing that suggests to him he knows not what, but that he means to look to bye-and-bye.

“Now, mother, I am an obstinate man, myself, and therefore your obstinacy is of no use. Tell me, can you or can you not walk?”

All the answer she could give him was to lay her head more at ease on the slatey earth, and murmur meekly in her cracked voice—

“N’s da!”

“No, no—not ‘Good-night,’ yet. Now for your bundle! Hark! do you hear it going down? I wish I could roll you with as little harm down the same crag—but as I can’t, I must do this.”

He knelt, raised her up, half sitting, turned his back to her, slid his arms under hers, and in a trice he was again on his feet, and labouring along under his load; which, happily for him, was not heavy,—had known too little nourishment to be in danger of such a state.

And in that position there came into his thoughts remembrances of old Delilahs of his experience and imagination, and the contrast seemed to him delicious in its bitterness.

He speculates upon her, and finds relief in

so doing, from speculations nearer home. Had she a soul to be saved? He could not tell! but by the living God he would save her body, if the thing was to be done. He felt thankful that such a thing as even this poor life was entrusted to him.

The wind was now coming in fearful rushes, so that to cross particular spots became at times impossible without delay.

On one such occasion he put down his burden for rest, and gazed about till he forgot alike her and himself in the extraordinary phenomena that presented itself. The day was yet light enough to see the valley but for the mist. Where he now stood on an isolated height, the fury of the wind kept the mist in a perpetual boil, but every instant it would open, the world beneath would be seen, then instantaneously close again, and so all round, towards every point of the compass. Anything more awful than the continued glimpses of the infernal caldron in which they seemed to stand—or than the mad dance that the world itself seemed to be performing round him, Cunliff had never seen. His imagination, which just then

drank deep of horror, soon pictured it all as a Cambrian Walpurgis night, a saturnalia for witches and devils, and, for aught he knew, here he was hugging one of the supernatural hags to his very breast.

When he took up his burden again, at the first lull of the tempest, he found her all but lifeless.

He began to find his own strength—which hitherto he had recklessly drawn upon—now fail; and with that came the thought he too would fail in what he had set himself to achieve.

The damp sweat is on his face. The obstacles are too tremendous. He glances for a single moment upwards to the sky—where nothing but mist meets his gaze—he utters in words no prayer, but the pleading, passionate cry of his soul is not the less heard.

It is for the poor old creature's life to be saved.

He ventures now upon the last of the really serious difficulties, the passage across an open, sloping space, on which the whole fury of the wind seems bent on expending itself.

Steadying his own and her weight at every

step, ready at any moment to drop to the ground, he passes two-thirds of the way in safety, and with something like exultation at his heart for that bit of conquest simply, when the two forms are caught from behind as by the power of a gently-touching, yet irresistible hand—the hand of the spirit of the giant mountain evoked for their destruction—which lifts him and his burden, gives no time for thought, or cry, and sweeps him and her along as but mere human straws.

“Hirell!” That is his last thought, hope, and aspiration, believing that the hour had indeed come! when lo, the dangling feet of the old woman strike against some projection of rock, that enabled Cunliff to stay the rush for a single moment, and that moment Cunliff used for his and her bodily salvation, by hugging the ground, as children might hug their mother, fresh from the most imminent danger.

He waits now for rest, as well as for the chance of a fresh lull, vainly striving to comfort the old woman by a few genial words from time to time; but at last he ventures the rest of the transit, succeeds, and all the

rest of the way is but fatigue, bodily pain, and assured success.

He leaves her at a little stone hut that he knows of, under shelter ; reaches Dolgarrog ; sends off a carriage and a couple of men for his late companion ; waits in the dreadful solitude of his chamber for the news of her safe arrival and recovery, thankful he has that yet to engross him ; then lies down in his clothes on the bed, not expecting long to stay there, even if to sleep at all, but he does sleep in spite of fate.

His last words as he was sinking into sleep were :

“ Men sleep, they say, before execution ; the devil’s in it if I can’t after.”

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE AWAKENING.

It would have been well for Sir John Cunliff if from that sleep there had been no awakening ; at least, such was his own conviction, when the first faint light of day met his opening eyes on the following morning.

It were useless to attempt even to indicate the sufferings of which such a man is capable, when every element of his nature is called into preternatural activity, his every faculty of perception into the most vivid life, but only to enhance the anguish over a blow struck at the most vital part.

He saw no one, locked and double locked his door, and then tried to persuade himself that the worst had passed, and that it was time for him to live a little more rationally.

The relief he felt might be such as the un-

fortunate Montezuma may be supposed to have experienced during those moments when the fire beneath happened to burn a little less fiercely, as the miscreant tormentors ceased for a moment to feed the flames.

He knew it not as yet, but this was the day for him of that vital revolution which all men of powerful and comprehensive natures experience at some time or other of their lives ; and which seems destined to enable them to go back to instincts, and first principles ; to cast off the slough of the world, as a serpent casts its skin ; and then to recover, and to unite with the experiences and strength of manhood the ideal aspiration of youth, without which the world is indeed but a valley of the shadow of death, a place of desolation and of dry bones.

On the dreadful yesterday, which already seems divided from him by some inconceivably vast gulf, he *felt* only. To-day he *thinks*, and though it seems but a change of suffering for suffering, it is progress.

Round and round the same set of thoughts go on perpetually circling, like that horrible devil's dance he had seen on Criba Ban, and leaving him no rest for the sole of his intel-

lectual foot. His love, from which he must turn as Lear turns from his peculiar danger, for "that way madness lies;" his humiliation; the cruel irony of fortune that he—a passionate lover of the ideal—should destroy such an ideal as Hirell would have made a reality of, for him; his weakness in crying as a child might cry that first will, then will not, then will again; the exposure before Elias, Chamberlayne, Kezia, and that bloated Puritan, the Rev. Ephraim Jones, such are the component parts of the hideous glimpses he gets on one side of his mental horizon.

Sick and dizzy with the whirl and confusion, he turns to another, his early, hopeful life, so full of worth, of promise, of brightness, of faith, of earnest will, of everything that could foreshadow a life of manly vigour and usefulness, alike for himself and his fellow men. Was all this utterly gone? Had indulgence eaten out the very heart of his manhood, so that he could only drop into the world's stream, and go where that went?

To stop thinking, while thinking led to nothing but chaos, he took up a newspaper that had come with some letters by the morning's

post, none of which had he opened. Had he thought it possible that any conceivable thing he might see there would tempt him to feel the least interest, he would have flung it into the fire. It was a purely mechanical action, one his fingers had long been used to.

He saw his name, allowed his eye to run down the column, pausing here and there, with a new and fierce light rising in his glance as he did so, then dropped his clenched hand on the damp paper, and told himself aloud, in conscious irony of his assumed quiet, the substance of what he had seen.

“My cottages at —, the subject of a special local enquiry, unknown to me or my agent, a report sent to the government—filth, overcrowding, nuisances, delicate suggestions of incest, hot beds of fever, death placed at my door—and this, the editor, my Tory assailant during the election, knowing how I have been violently opposed at every step in rebuilding—knowing what I am about to do for a thorough reformation, hastens to contrast with the sensation, so he calls it, everywhere excited by my maiden speech, which prepared every one for some new social apostle; and

here he is, the Radical M.P. and Baronet, Sir John Cunliff!

"Of course, since this is *here*, it is also in every British newspaper, regaling every hearth in the three kingdoms with the spectacle of me, hung out as it were—a spectacle to gods and men—the arch hypocrite of my age!"

He stopped. No fit of violence now offered even a temporary relief. Literally, the man's heart seemed broken. It might be a pitiful thing to say, but somehow he had a sort of sacred respect for his name, for his reputation. It was in its stainlessness as regards men, a kind of bond by which he held some security for the future. That was gone. He might build and reform as he pleased; spend as he pleased; toil as he pleased. Never again would there be any verdict for him, but that he had been simply driven by the outraged voice of public opinion no longer to violate the public decency.

He tried to walk about his room, tried to eat, tried to read, raised and lowered the blinds again and again, found an old chair in a dark corner of his long apartment, and there sat for a long time staring at vacancy.

He saw a book on the sideboard, fetched it, found it was a Bible, opened the leaves and began ; then, stung by something, hurled the book back towards its place. Seeing it fall to the ground, and lie there sprawling in an unseemly fashion, he took it up, went back to his chair, and tilted up the legs, keeping his knees together to make a place for the book.

With a sort of half-scorn, a quick impatient hand, he turned over the leaves once more, restlessly and aimlessly, as if after all he were thinking of something else. By accident he thus left the book open opposite the 1st of Corinthians, and read aloud in that abstracted kind of voice which indicates an effort to recall the thought from some more tempting theme :

“And whether one member suffer all the members suffer with it ; or one member be honoured, all rejoice with it.”

This he read a second time, then remarked :
“Why the whole spirit of true government is summed up in that !”

He began now to hunt for things that might be similarly noticeable, and lighted upon this, from the Romans :—

"We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak."

He made no remark, but pondered long before he again turned over the leaves, and read from Revelations :—

"Because thou sayest I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing, and knowest not that thou art wretched and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked, I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich, and white raiment that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eye with eyesalve that thou mayest see."

When he again read—still continuing to read aloud, as if disputing with the fear that he could not—his voice broke with emotion, which was instantly checked, and he read the next in silence :—

"And the fruits that thy soul lusted after are departed from thee, and all things which were dainty and goodly are departed from thee, and thou shalt find them no more at all."

He could for some time read no more, but closed the Bible with a gentle touch, set it down, and paced his chamber silently for perhaps an hour. Then again he took the book up, saying in a low voice —

"God help me! I don't understand all this! No mortal man could have spoken more directly to me, and so anatomized me."

He was soon made to understand it, when he lighted upon the text :—

"For the word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart."

"To what end, O God," he cried in irresistible passion, "to what end, if Thou wilt not show me the path out of this my intolerable shame and anguish?"

He could read no more, but went to bed, not to sleep, but to try once more to shut out the light that wounded alike body and soul.

Futile effort. He was soon poring over the Bible again, knowing well what he wanted to find, and which he had chosen not before to see. He found it, read it to himself many times over in silence, then once aloud, and once only :—

"That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the spirit is spirit.

"Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."

To the last days of the world's existence, men like Cunliff, however powerfully moved to the regeneration of life, to the sense of the necessity of something that can only be worthily described by the words, New Birth, will still differ in the mode of manifesting their experience, from the mode of those who have led simpler, less artificial lives, whose natures are less complex, though possibly even still more strong. Whatever of the nature of conversion Cunliff was now to know, it was not the conversion of Christian in Bunyan's immortal allegory. The pride of knowledge, of culture, of intellect, is exceedingly adverse to the straightforward, noble simplicity, and uncompromising earnestness which characterises truly religious men ; and makes them accept the new light and faith without a murmur, except as to their own profound unworthiness.

He had often before now amused himself by taking up one by one the cardinal points of religious belief :—new birth, atonement, faith, confession, and so on, in order to show the natural elements in each, which all reasonable men would acknowledge. And

thus he explained the doctrines away till they might be very perfect logically, but leading to no earthly benefit for any human being.

He saw now with surprise it was possible to reverse the process to a precisely opposite issue, and began to mount by the well-known familiar steps.

Our space, and the nature of our book forbids further development. But, to illustrate the action of Cunliff's mind, let it be briefly observed, that he found on recalling by the aid of his superb memory the lives of great men, it was almost always to be discovered that they had passed through that memorable phase, which Dante calls 'new life,' and which turned Cromwell from gambling and other dissolute courses, into one of the greatest of the world's men. Seeing *that*, Cunliff found to himself *now* the courage to treat at its exact value the ridicule, the knowingness of society, and to think only of his real need.

Two other texts there were which affected him strangely :—

"Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love him."

"For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ."

The inconceivable beauty and grandeur of all these passages, which he placed before him carefully copied out—of these and many others—filled him with something that was not hope, nor pleasure, nor desire of life, but that was at least likely again to lead to such things when the awful period of transition should be gone through.

They suggested, also, powerfully to him the inner harmony between them and the life he had always vaguely yearned for in spirit; and so the harmony between the life of this world, and the life of that to come, which it is the true work of the statesman, the philosopher, the poet, the artist, the philanthropist, to restore. As to Cunliff, while the very thought of hoping or caring for aught personal was simply in his present state revolting, he found himself drawn irresistibly to

hope and care for others ; and note with wonder how all his wanderings seemed somehow or other to lead finally to this.

He summed up the results of his life, having first asked if he could do it truly, that is justly and inexorably.

In the light, whether lurid or pure, of those facts, he studied his own character—what it had been, what it should be.

Then he scanned narrowly his aspirations, and the quality of his own powers to realise them, if indeed he were about to realise anything.

Finally he asked himself—Could he thenceforward consecrate his life, fortune, and whatever of health, heart, strength, and ability God might have given, or left him to the service of his poorer countrymen, at a moment when it seemed to him that a social revolution impended, of the gravest—possibly of the grandest—character?

To quiet the anxieties of his kind landlady, as well as from apprehension of her gossip, he admitted her to his room with food, and ate.

The next few days were spent in silent,

continuous study and labour. Many letters were written, much business got through. And, although he went no more abroad than he could help, (especially when he found how popular the episode of the old woman had made him) still he would walk out occasionally ; and it was noticed by those who had known him ever since his first arrival among them a year ago, how changed he was in manner. He spoke to no one of his own motion, but if spoken to there was a strange gentleness in the tone of the voice, a pleasant, though sad, light in the eye, which threatened even to place him among the simple-hearted Welsh on a pedestal high and peculiar as Hirell's own ; but of which he knew nothing, suspected nothing.

All this while he had been discussing within himself a certain act of duty which it seemed to him he ought to perform, and just one week after the collapse of all his hopes and worldly strength, he set out for Dola' Hudol. He had heard that both Mr. and Mrs. Rhys were at the house, and that the lady was very ill.

CHAPTER XXIV.

MIDNIGHT AND DAWN.

THE first thing that made Elias aware of Sir John's departure, was the opening and gentle closing of the house door.

At that sound he and Kezia looked at each other with eyes full of tender fear, then went together to the room, where they found Hirell with her arms and face on the bureau, white and senseless.

Together they revived her and carried her up to her own room.

When Robert came back from the Abbey Farm, there was an almost deathly silence in the house. He found no one in the kitchen, and as he sat there waiting he felt himself punished for the joy that had almost made him tremble when he had seen Sir John Cunliff

crossing the little bridge at Capel Iltyd. He had seen him do this as he stood at the refectory door giving his opinion on the merits of a new horse the master of the Abbey Farm had just brought home from Dolgarrog fair. Then Robert when he saw him, was assured of the truth ; and it had amazed him and filled him with a strong irrepressible hope, and a gladness of which he was too much ashamed to go back at once to Bod Elian. He could not stay at the Abbey Farm, his excitement was too great to be concealed, so he went for a walk on Moel Mawr, and did not return till he was thoroughly tired, and his shoulder was paining him, and forcing him to think more of Cunliff and less of his own suddenly revived hopes.

When he found himself so long alone in the lower part of the house, and heard no sound anywhere about it, his heart sank within him. He had so schooled himself, his look, his voice, before he entered, that his untimely joy might not shew itself too plainly ; and then there he sat alone, his hopes growing fainter and fainter, his fears stronger, as the slow minutes passed.

At last, nearly an hour after he had been in, Kezia came down stairs.

The first thing he saw her do as he lifted his eyes in almost timid enquiry to her face, was by no means comforting. She sat down in a chair, and putting her apron to her eyes, had, what she afterwards called, a good cry ; but to poor Robert it was a bad and ominous one.

He sat looking perplexed and anxious till it occurred to him that the poor woman had probably touched nothing since their early breakfast, and now it was past four.

She had brought a little tray with tea on it, downstairs with her, and seeing this on the dresser, Robert made use of his house-keeping experiences at the Hooded House to pour Kezia out a cup of tea, which he brought her as gallantly as if she had been one of the finest young ladies in one of the best drawing-rooms at Reculcester.

"Indeed now, Master Robert. Only to think !" said Kezia, as he took her apron out of her hand, and put the cup of tea into it ; then, after sipping it, she added :—

"It's just that beautiful I'll take it up to

Elias, for not a bite or sup, Master Robert, has passed his lips since breakfast."

"Nor yours either. You'll do no such thing," said Robert, laying his hand on her shoulder. "You shall take him some afterwards. Drink this yourself, and here's some cake in my pocket Cicely Lloyd sent for you."

Sitting on the edge of the high table, he watched her in silence a minute or two, then said:—

"Is it very sad up there, Kezia?"

"Oh, Master Robert, her suffering is very sad to see. She has given him up: you know that she has vowed she will never marry him?"

"And now, Kezia, now you think the act is costing her—her life perhaps? Is it not, Kezia?"

"O, the poor lamb!" cried Kezia, setting down the cup and resuming the apron, "to see her on her knees, Master Robert, to hear her, ever since she came to from her faint, calling herself the cause of all her father's troubles, and asking forgiveness for her false pride, and I can't tell you all. Her father

has prayed with her, and comforted her now, a bit, and they are sitting talking beautiful to hear, Master Robert. But oh, she is that white and cold! and when we try to make her lie down she says she cannot rest till her heart is more at peace."

"Yes, it will kill her, Kezia, don't *you* feel it will kill her?" said Robert, almost fiercely, then in voice suddenly softened, he said, as he took her hand:—

"Kezia, *I* am nothing now, of course? I may do nothing, may not see her, perhaps, for many days, may I?"

Robert had always been a great favourite of Kezia's, and now when he stood looking her "through and through" as she said, his eyes questioning her so much more beseechingly and wistfully than his lips had done, she was moved a second time to use Elias' confidence in her, in a manner with which he would certainly not have been pleased.

"Oh, Master Robert, you must not expect things to be different, not yet, if ever," said Kezia. "I ought not to tell you, but I would not have you hoping with that hope that maketh the heart sick. They have talked

about you, Master Robert. Her father asked her in their talk how her heart was towards you, and she cried very much, and called herself ungrateful, but begged and prayed of us to let her stay with us, and say no more about you, and she knew you would find one more deserving, and all that. Oh, Robert, the truth is, she feels her heart is broken."

"Thank you, Kezia; I will keep all this a secret, and I will go away to-morrow. I'll cause her no distress—God forbid I should do that if I cannot comfort her—which I would cut off my right hand to do."

"Ah, Master Robert, you have been faithful to her, and always so tender in saving her any pain, the Lord will reward you at His own time—in His own way."

She went up then to Hirell's room, and Elias came down.

Robert and he did not speak; but Robert when he came in set a chair for him, and waited upon him with a woman's care and gentleness. He was filled with a gratitude too deep for words for what Elias had tried to do for him—too deep for words even if he had not been compelled to be silent for

Kezia's sake. He was so surprised, too ; for he had little thought that Hirell's father considered him so worthy of her as to be induced to overlook the differences of their religion, though he certainly knew Robert was not one to interfere with Hirell's faith.

Elias was in a very silent and absorbed mood when he came down, and did not speak for a long time or take any apparent heed of Robert's attention ; but when at last he awoke from his sorrowful obliviousness to the fact that he was eating food of which he stood in great need, and was being waited upon and supplied with every comfort, and saw, too, Robert's own dainty wool-worked slippers on his feet—he looked up at Robert, then down at the slippers, then at the table, and the toast cut and buttered on his plate, and then he turned his eyes again on the handsome, subdued face bending down near the fire, and gazed upon it with a look of deep, solemn regret and sorrow. Robert felt rather than saw the look, and understood it to mean—"my lad, thy fate is fixed. I cannot alter it." He understood it so well that he felt he should make some reply to it, but all

the reply he could make was to answer Elias' gaze with a look manly and cheery, and a smile short-lived as lightning, but it made Elias' eyes glisten as he withdrew them.

- He spent the rest of the evening at his daughter's side, at the request of Robert; who made Kezia tell him all there was to see to indoors, and who did ever so much more than was necessary, or than Elias would have approved of his doing on a Sunday evening, had he known.

Kezia and Elias never once left Hirell alone till prayer-time, and then when they and Robert were on their knees, came a cry of wild restlessness and pain—

“Father! father!”

It thrilled Elias to his heart's core, but he would not rise till his prayer was ended. But Robert could not bear it—could not have her call left a second unanswered. He rose and crept up to the foot of the stairs and called softly, but with his whole heart's love and yearning breathing in his voice,

“Hirell, dear Hirell, what is it? He is coming—he is coming instantly.”

It was not till the middle of the night,

when he had heard Kezia go from Hirell to her own room, and Elias leave his to take his second watch beside his daughter, it was not till then, when the house was very still and he found himself yet sitting cold and reluctant to move in the great kitchen, that Robert knew to the full how bitter his disappointment was to him.

He felt like a man who sees himself being fast overtaken by a black devouring tide, from which he tries vainly to escape. His life had so little fitted him to know how to endure a prospect of long years of joylessness and hopelessness, such as he saw before him, that he felt himself to-night rebelling against fate like a passionate coward, as he called himself. Other men had to face such things, and why should not he? And yet he felt as if he would rather that the wound in his shoulder should open afresh, and let him bleed to death—or that he should fall from the Major's coach on his way to Llansaint-fraid, over Criba Ban, and be dashed to pieces in some slate quarry—or come to any end rather than go back home to live under

this new and frightful feeling of gloom and despair.

Until that long and wretched night Robert had scarcely known what real suffering was, but he had it then in its very essence.

Once when his fears for Hirell's life sickened him so that he could not remain still, he crept up the stairs, and listened near her door. He heard her voice and her father's talking very quietly, and he heard with a deep emotion his own name uttered by her.

It calmed him wonderfully. He became filled with shame at his own self-pity, now that he knew she had a pitying thought for him.

Welcoming that one bit of sweet faint comfort in his heart, he went back, and sitting down at the long table, and laying his head on his arms, fell into a calm dreamless sleep.

It had been very near dawn when he fell asleep, and in less than an hour the light and the twittering of the birds woke him.

At first the sight of brown bare oak everywhere he looked, made him fancy himself at the

Hooded House ; and the remembrance of where he really was, and how he was to return home that day, came to him bitterly enough.

He heard steps on the stairs, and started, for he wondered what Kezia would say to him at finding he had been there all night.

As he rose and was looking towards the door, grasping his chair, he was filled with astonishment to see Elias come in holding Hirell's hand.

As he looked at them and saw them coming straight towards him—Hirell in one of the fresh light dresses his mother had made her wear at Brockhurst—Robert doubted if he were indeed fully awake.

“Robert Chamberlayne,” said Elias, “my child and I have this night wrestled with her sorrow, as Jacob wrestled with the angel ; we have talked of and considered with much prayer for divine guidance, how best we may bring back to her the peace of her mind, and the happiness of her heart, both of which have even thus early been lost to her. We have considered, too, that it will be well to save her from having her soul tempted to break a vow she has vowed before God never

to marry the erring, but I trust repentant man you once called your friend, John Cunliff. We have considered, too, Robert, that you, having been faithful in your love for her as Jacob to Rachel, generous to her in her time of trouble and exile, as Boaz to Ruth—we have considered that to you more than any other should the work of comfort and cherishing belong ; and to that end I give her to you, and she gives herself to you—not now with the love that you deserve, but in the full trust and belief that it will come. She said to me, Robert, that last night when you rose even from addressing your Maker to answer her call, your voice went unto her heart with a strange warmth and comfort. Was it not so, Hirell ?”

Robert, as he listened to these words, had been looking upon the sweet chastened face of Hirell, with eyes that at first were doubting and perplexed ; but that soon had vied with the early morning skies outside, in glistening light and depth.

When Elias said “ Was it not so, Hirell ?” he placed at the same time her hand in Robert’s, and Hirell answered faintly—

“Yes.”

Then Elias gently unwound the clinging fingers of her other hand from his, and drawing her nearer to Robert, said—

“Take her then, Robert, and be not impatient with her sorrow, which I have strong belief will only cover her soul for a time; therefore regard it only as the veil with which the women of the scriptures veiled themselves when they were first brought before their husbands, even as Rebecca veiled herself when she beheld Isaac coming to meet her. I have judged it best that the marriage should be very soon, for the sakes of both you and of another.”

Then Robert drew her to his heart and kissed her, and in his smile she seemed to see a reflection of the great peace and sunshine of that home of his, where she was to spend her life. As she closed her eyes upon his shoulder, a sense of rest came over her, she stretched her hand towards her father, and as he gave her his she held it close to hers and Robert's.

“You will love him very soon, Hirell, and

dearly," said Elias, "he is not a gifted man, but he is what the Lord loves better, an honest man in whom there is no guile."

"Father, I know him."

CHAPTER XXV.

LETTER FROM SIR JOHN CUNLIFF TO ELIAS
MORGAN.

“Dolgarrog.

“DEAR SIR,

“I fear I am again going to make you angry—but shall be content if your anger does not also extend to my companion and friend, Hugh.

“We have again met, and to me unexpectedly. I find he has come down here, hoping to be of service some way or other to me, and specially in undoing an impression that he fancies his letters may have given Hirell, about his indisposition towards me. I was fortunate enough to meet him on his way to you, to convince him his errand was ended, and—

“Why make a short story long? We

understand each other too well in all things to be inclined just now to separate. I have made him abandon Tidmans, and promise to accompany me on a short tour abroad ; hoping to send him back to you, when we return, as sound of body as he is of mind ; and prepared to enter on his vocation as a musician in a more earnest spirit, and with more deliberate care as to the means, than have hitherto been possible to him.

“ Forgive him, then, if he needs forgiveness. As to myself, I shall wait till you see what the next few months do for him before asking an opinion on my conduct.

“ I know, sir, and respect your fear ; but I have not been so successful in tampering with my own faith to be at all inclined to repeat the process with another. That which has made him—you—Kezia—Hirell—what you all are, I bend before in true humility ; and would rather ask that your belief might be imparted to me—were that possible—than mine infused in him. If that, then, be your only fear—as I cannot but hope it may be—dismiss it, I entreat you, as baseless.

“ You will hear from Hugh shortly. He

will keep you regularly informed of all our movements, so that it will not be at all difficult for you to answer some, at least, of the letters he proposes to write you weekly.

“Before this reaches you we shall have started.

“Farewell,

“J. C.

“Hugh has written to his friend the Rev. Ephraim Jones.”

CHAPTER XXVI.

DIES IRÆ.

AVOIDING the ostentation of a carriage, Sir John walked the distance to Dola' Hudol, and on reaching the mansion, sent in his card.

A painful incident occurred. The servant had gone away, and he was mechanically reclosing his card-case, when some memorandum on the back of one of the cards attracted his eye. He turned the card, and saw written, Mr. John Rymer,—and felt once more in all their bitterness, the sad, degrading incidents that had brought him to this place. A sudden passion of disgust overmastered him, and he tore the card to pieces. Then he prayed in his soul for patience, to face the dreadful ordeal before him.

The servant returned instantly, and bowing

with marked respect, led him to the drawing-room.

There he sat for some minutes, before the door opened, and Mr. Rhys entered; stiff, and stately; but with a kind of emphasized courtesy in the reception of his visitor, which agreeably surprised Cunliff, as soon as he realised the fact.

After the first formal greeting, and Mr. Rhys' request that Sir John would be seated, a request which was unattended to, there was a pause, a very painful one to Cunliff; and Mr. Rhys was sufficiently accommodating to begin to speak words of congratulation on his accession to—when he was interrupted.

“Congratulations, sir, of any kind, are out of place to me here, and from you. Allow me to explain my presence. When a man is conscious of wrong-doing, and has reason to fear that others have been deeply injured by his acts, I beg you, sir, to tell me how he may best discharge his duty, and ease his conscience. Tell me that, sir, and I shall, if it be humanly possible, make you the amends you yourself appoint. Meantime, I beg to

express my most profound regret ; and to say that I know few things henceforward that I more care to obtain than your forgiveness."

He ceased. Mr. Rhys gazed at him, as a man gazes who lacks faith in the exterior presented, and is trying to see behind the screen, while doing it politely.

He then handed Cunliff a lady's card, on which he saw written with a pencil in a handwriting so tremulous that it thrilled him to see, words to the effect that Mr. and Mrs. Rhys, having heard of Sir John Cunliff's presence in the neighbourhood, would feel obliged by a call at his leisure.

Knowing not what to make of all this, except that it seemed to say Mrs. Rhys was better, and, probably, reconciliation come to, Cunliff felt a great spirit of thankfulness in his heart, and waited in silence.

"Would you like to see my wife?" asked Mr. Rhys, with the same calm manner.

Sir John hesitated to reply. He could hardly say no, and yet his judgment and feeling alike warned him there could be no good in such an interview, and might be danger to his secret resolves, his new impulses, the

altogether new life he desired to enter upon when he repassed this terrible threshold.

"I may remark, Sir John, that this is probably the last time my wife is likely to receive you," said Mr. Rhys.

"She is no worse, I trust?" asked Cunliff, casting about for some mode of escape.

"I hope not; I believe not. But you shall judge for yourself who have known her in health. Will you go with me?"

Mr. Rhys hardly waited for an answer, but passed to another door, leading to a corridor that was strangely darkened.

"Will you step in, Sir John?"

"Is he going to murder me?" was Cunliff's agitated impulse of inquiry, but he was angry with himself a moment afterwards that he was not more even in mood. The peace he yearned for, alas, had not yet come.

He did not hesitate, but walked on into the darkened corridor, Mr. Rhys closely following him, and so they walked right through to its end.

Again Mr. Rhys, with formal politeness, opened the door, bowed, and waited for his visitor to go in first.

The moment he had entered the room, he turned fiercely upon Mr. Rhys who was still closely following him, and seemed as if he would fly at his throat.

But the terror that had seized him soon froze the blood it had sent rushing so hotly to his brain.

His hand fell powerless, his chest heaved, there was a chair near the door—he felt for it—groping blindly with outstretched hand and drooping head; and thus standing, heard a voice speaking quietly, very quietly—

“I am glad to bring together the artist and his work.”

As if a blinding light pained his eyes, Cunliff shaded them with his cold and shaking hand, while he looked towards the bed where the body of Catherine Rhys lay, resting in all the sad pomp of death.

Fearful was the still beauty of the closed eyes with their large, blue tinted lids, and golden lashes; fearful the marble smile; fearful the never-to-be-broken muteness of the sweet pale lips. The head rested on a cloud of gold—that wonderful hair which loving fingers had spread out wide over the pillow;

and which the dimly burning watch-candles lit with a faint, unearthly radiance.

Then the waxen hands—how perfect, how motionless! One holds, with meek obedience, the jasmine flowers that have been placed within it, while the other, pale, faultless as an artist's model, lies straight at the side of the young form, full and regal of outline as that of some Scandinavian princess.

There was no daylight in the room. The windows were covered with black hangings, and the bier with its lights, its awful whiteness, and pure, cold beauty, shone like a star in a black sky—frosty, lovely, blinding—O how blinding to the eyes of the man who tottered a step or two forwards, and knelt by her.

For a long time it was all chilling, all agonising to his soul, but at last its beauty began to be felt there, not only as a terror, but as something that in its effect upon him was almost like hope. Like the star that led the wise men of the East to the light of the world, so it drew his spirit from its deadly anguish and its darkness, and made it look where there was light. The mysterious

beauty and glory that seemed to radiate from that still form, was like a message—a token, left for him by one who had seen further than human eye might see, and whose seeing had been sublime and joyous, and who bade him look up from his depths of misery, to live, repent, strive, conquer.

At last the silent watcher, who had been standing with folded arms at the door, apparently obeying, as he looked on, a foregone purpose of stern, terrible, overwhelming duty, touched Cunliff's shoulder, saying—

“Rise, sir, and come away.”

He rose submissively, but as he half turned to follow, the fierce tide of human passion hitherto subdued and awed by the solemnity of this sudden meeting with the dead, burst forth and shook him like an ague.

Supporting himself by holding with both hands the chair, by which he had been kneeling, he gazed at the bier in uncontrollable anguish, and forgetting that there was any one near, cried out—his voice rising and sinking in quick gasps—

“O, what a life should have been here—to be worthy of this exquisite form—this

entrancing beauty—this sweetness—of the soul it lodged—of the love that throbbed with every pulse of her heart!”

“Will you oblige me by following me now, sir?” said Mr. Rhys.

“Sweet, most sweet face! Why does it smile? So great a sufferer, and smiling, Catherine? Does she smile because she thinks the excess of her punishment may be taken to lighten mine which is greater than I can bear?”

“Come, sir, even the voice of repentance is a desecration in this room.”

“Yes, forgive me, forgive me,” said Cunliff, his awe returning upon him.

Mr. Rhys opened the door and saw him pass out, followed, and closed it gently, turning his head away as he saw Cunliff remaining to touch the panel with his lips.

He then led his visitor to the library.

There was an old Elizabethan chair at the foot of the long library table, where Hugh used to sit when he copied manuscripts for the antiquarian. He motioned to Cunliff to seat himself in it, and when he had obeyed, placed

ink and paper before him, then remained standing, resting his fingers on the table.

"You asked me," he began, in a steady, cold voice, "to appoint what amends I think you can now make. They are very slight: First, Sir John Cunliff, I demand that for which my wife wrote you the invitation you see on the card I gave you—I demand a letter from herself to you. You will know it, she said; she wished me to obtain it of you."

It was something to be permitted the comfort of obeying her once more—he valued it even more than what he was asked to resign.

"Do me the justice of believing, sir, that it was in order to show you by that letter," he said, "that I alone was seriously guilty, that I came to-day."

"You are welcome," replied the cold voice, "though I have long been aware of the fact you mention, and it is in regard to my wife's wishes only that I ask for the letter."

"This is it, sir."

Mr. Rhys took it from him with a formal bow of acknowledgment. No other thanks did Cunliff receive for his valued treasure, and it was valued more dearly than he had before

known. But he felt himself to be undergoing a kind of mental death, the bitterness and darkness of which he must face without hoping to bear with him one of his heart's dearest possessions.

Its new owner took it to the window to read.

In a few minutes, having placed it in his desk, which stood open at that end of the table, he returned to Cunliff, his face more pale and stern than before.

"It was my intention, Sir John Cunliff," he said, "after my wife's funeral, to seek you in whatever part of the world you might be, and request you to favour me by writing on this paper a few words I should have dictated. I ask you now to do so. If you refuse—of course I can permit no altercation in this house of mourning—I must wait; but if you consent, you will be released of all fear of my trespassing on your time hereafter."

He placed a sheet of note-paper before Cunliff, who, looking at it, read these words in the widower's writing—

"Died, at Dola' Hudol, North Wales, on

the 13th of September, 18—, Catherine Rhys, aged 20, wife of Owen Rhys."

"And what is it you wish?" asked Cunliff, looking at it with dim eyes. O that little score of years, what a summer of sunshine, bloom, thunderstorm, and utter ruin, had it been! His whole soul was mourning over the vivid little life, when he was startled by the cold monotonous voice beside him, saying,

"An unpunishable criminal, like yourself—be seated, sir; no vehemence can be permitted within these walls, while she from whom we have just come, still hallows them with her presence: and if *I* am calm in speaking of these matters, surely *you* should be. I repeat an unpunishable criminal like yourself, unless he be no longer a man at all, but a very devil, must consider he owes something to his victim's mourners in their bereavement."

"To what end, sir, do you inflict this torture? Could my life, could a thousand such lives as mine pay you for hers?"

"Your life, Sir John, is safe enough for me; the laws of this kingdom forbid my injuring it, as well as the laws of that in which I hope to meet my wife, and to regain the priceless

treasure of her love which might now have been mine, had you not come between us, and seen the folly of so sweet a blessing crowning the grey hairs of so old a man. We knew *some* happy days before you came—if you can condescend to believe so apparently preposterous a fact—but you did come, you played your part in the tragedy of this old and once honoured house, and from thence its doom was sealed.”

He here became aware that he was allowing the icy calmness he had maintained hitherto to become disturbed. He paused, and, when he spoke again, his voice was once more level, cold, almost courteous.

“I have not been wandering from the subject of my request, Sir John, though you may think so; I wish you to be perfectly aware that I had faith in my power of making my wife happy—rather, perhaps, by virtue of her generosity than my own merits—before you came between us; I wish you to be perfectly aware that I have watched the effects of your influence over her—that I have seen it gradually killing her. I know all this, and I wish you to be aware that I know it; but, sir, I

am an old man, I shall spend many lonely hours here—I may grow morbid—I may sometimes forget the truth to my own torture—I may, perhaps, be tempted to listen to what the world will say; ‘she was unhappy through her marriage—she died broken-hearted.’ In my loneliness, and morbidness because of it, I may take this view of her death, and madden myself with it. I have thought, sir, that at such times it will be well for me to have the criminal’s own acknowledgment of his guilt, in his own writing, and this is what I ask you for—here, upon this paper. Here is the date of her death—you will please write beneath it your acknowledgment that it was caused by you—and sign your name.”

Cunliff raised his eyes to the face belonging to that hand which was steadily moving the inkstand towards him. The face was calm—grave now, rather than stern—but implacable.

“Sign, sir. This paper will be seen by no eye but mine. It is a poor satisfaction—it is all I shall ever ask of you.”

Then the widower stood again at Cunliff’s

side, resting his long fingers on the table and watching him.

It was the only drop of sweet revenge he had allowed himself to look for. He had told his frenzy when it raged within him beyond control—this much it should have and no more. This much though it were bought dearly—ever so dearly—this, and no more.

He waited very patiently for him to begin. The silence was long and almost breathless.

“And you call me unpunishable, Mr. Rhys,” was said at last in a strange sepulchral voice, “while you rack my soul thus. A pen, if you please.”

One was placed in his hand; both hands as they touched were very cold and damp.

Cunliff seized the pen and wrote; Mr. Rhys watched.

They were interrupted by a heavy drop of water falling on the paper, and running into the ink, and obliterating the words that had been written.

Mr. Rhys quietly took the paper, and copying into another sheet the record of his wife's death, replaced it before Cunliff.

Again the writing was begun, but it so

happened that the freshly traced words in his host's writing, took a more than ever pathetic meaning, again unbidden and unwelcome drops of agony fell, and deluged the clean fair page, till it was impossible to write on it.

Again the stern and ever watchful eyes saw and noted the accident, and the quiet hand, scarcely this time so firm as before, took the paper gently away, and with wonderful patience re-wrote the sad words on another sheet, and placed that before his visitor as he had done the other two.

This time he did not remain standing at his side and watching him, but walked to the window.

As he stood there some repulsive sound seemed to meet his ear, for he remained listening with his face strongly expressive of annoyance and surprise.

He opened the window. As he did so the sweet church bells of Capel Iltyd filled the room with vehement joyous music.

Mr. Rhys called to a gardener at work near, and asked him in a voice terrible in its intensity, what so untimely a jubilee could mean.

The man answered him that some one had already been sent up to have the bell-ringing stopped. Mr. Lloyd was away, and he supposed the clergyman who had taken his place for the time had yielded to the solicitations of the village people up there, to have the bells rung in honour of Hirell Morgan's wedding to-day. Though she was a chapel woman, Mr. Lloyd had always said they should be rung on that occasion, if she married his pupil, which she had done.

The man was English, and though he spoke in a subdued voice, he was heard at the furthest end of the library.

Mr. Rhys was aware of this—was aware, too, by degrees, of the effect the man's words must be having upon his visitor at the library table. He had heard enough of Sir John's recent history to know this. And he felt with an unholy passion, that the work of punishment was being taken out of his hands into mightier ones—Cunliff was being made insensible to his efforts by this new calamity. For the moment his thirst for revenge became fiercer for being baffled.

He shut down the window, and slowly

returned to the table to see how the confession was progressing.

This time it had been nearly completed, but now—as Mr. Rhys looked down upon it—nothing but a watery, inky blister met his view, and moreover the writer's hands were clenched upon it, and his head was so bowed as to nearly touch them.

Drawing his hand again and again down his long grey beard, Mr. Rhys stood regarding him, full of thought and perplexity.

Suddenly his eyes lit with a generous fire worthy of those valiant Celtic princes from whom he was so proud of tracing his descent.

Gently he laid one hand on the blistered paper, and said, pointing to the door with the other—

“Go, Sir John Cunliff, go bearing with you my full forgiveness, and the thought that her last tears were shed for you. May they baptize your soul anew. You need not write what I asked you. Since nature blots out the record may God blot out the sin.”

THE END.



